

Public Involvement Overview

February 2009

	Month
Hotline Calls*	26
Comment Sense Submissions/Inquiries**	38
FOIA requests	0
Speakers Bureau	18
Presentation/Events	7
Neighborhood Boards	11
TAC	0
Community meetings	0

*Calls directly to the hotline 808.566.2299

** Includes all comments/inquiries via Project website from the end of the official DEIS comment period on February 6, 2009 to the end of the month.

Submission Date	Submission Content/Notes
02/27/2009	Has the timeframe/date been established for issuance of rail station design RFP? My firm, Hawaii Architecture LLP has submitted the SOQ in response to the annual professional services ad issued by CC of Honolulu's Department of Design & Construction and was approved for architectural design & planning services for the current fiscal year, among others. Does this automatically qualify us to be considered for the DoT's rail design projects? Are there any additional pre-qualification setps we need to complete in anticipation on the rail station design RFP? Is there a way to be automatially informed by the DoT/CC of Honolulu about the RFP, as soon as it is issued? Thank you in advance for your reply.
02/27/2009	Recently, I reviewed Chapter 6 (Cost and Financial Analysis) of the Draft EIS. I am currently a planning student at UH working on a project in which I will be analyzing the formula used to calculate the capital, operating, and maintenance costs of the Honolulu Rail Transit System. I would like to request a copy of the spreadsheet(s) used to calculate the aforementioned costs. It is my understanding that you used the "Standard Cost Categories" Worksheet provided by the Federal Transit Administration for estimating these costs. I have a copy of this worksheet, but I lack the actual input data that were used for Honolulu's specific situation. I thank you for your assistance as it is greatly needed at this time. Sincerely, Aaron Mann, eamann@hawaii.edu
02/25/2009	You guys missed a big financial assistance gap. If you went close to Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, Honolulu Airport, and/or Schofield: Honolulu rail project could have received military financial help by stating in time of war the rail would be used for transporting military support. This is how the H-3 received military financial help. Aloha, Jimbo
02/25/2009	Is there no limit to how big the population can grow here in Hawaii? Is there no end in building on a small island? What does the bottom of Oahu (Island) looks like? The golf course at Ocean Point reach ocean water just by digging a large hole in the ground when they first started to build a golf course. I am sure there are many homes are on reef and below the reef is ocean water. Is Oahu like the shape of a mushroom? Or are we taken for granted nothing will happen to this Island? Especially when weather temp. is changing every year. I believe we are missing a lot of critical components to this issue pretaining to rail transit, to over populating this Island, rising cost in the near future when every one expect it to be smooth riding, I'm certain the bus fare will also go up. Where does this circle stop? If you tell me there is no beginning nor end, then there will be a big problem. We are greatly in dept now and have been a long time. How is it that a man borrow money to pay off his dept ending up with a bigger dept to pay off? History repeating itself? Something is missing besides money in the mind of the rich and that is WISDOM. I,m hoping the retiree can get some good pay raises and the health care system will not raise their cost. Hopefully the Health Isurance will not

Submission Date	Submission Content/Notes
	constantly raise their fee every year. All this will be a part of the rail transit issue and much more.
02/23/2009	Hi! Our Iolani RoboRaiders Zoom team is very interested in learning more about rail transit in Hawaii. I was wondering if there was anyone that either gave field trips or came out and did speaking on the subject of rail. Please let me know if this would be possible. The team consists of 9 4th - 7th graders who, over the next few months, will be coming up with ways to make future transportation more efficient. Thank you for your time!
02/23/2009	Curious about the project and construction timeline. When are you planning on going to out bid?
02/23/2009	I am currently Chief Controller for the Operations Control Center at a Light Rail Transit facility. I'm always looking to extend my networking contacts. Your project seems to be among the best-conceived of the various new-starts/potential new-starts in the country.
02/23/2009	Looks like a great project and is driven by all the right reasons. Good luck in your efforts.
02/23/2009	I have a question regarding the route of the transit. I did review the maps on the site (last updated on 11/08). I have heard some talk about re-routing the train to queen street instead of halekauwila st. due to some possible security concerns with federal buildings. Could you please get back to me regarding this matter. Please call 539-4946. thanks, Becky
02/21/2009	Re: Feb 2009 newsletter in article "City Council Picks New Route." Article states ". . . the airport serves 58,000 daily arrivals - a figure projected to double in the next 20 years." I wish that had as much confidence in any kind of economic projections that have been used to justify the rail. Back in the early part of 2008 when the Rail debate started to pick up steam, we weren't even able project the wild upward swing in price of oil/gas during the summer of 2008 and its eventual impact on the economy and traffic. Add to that: The tumble oil/gas prices that followed was just as much a surprise. Who projected that that would happen? And who back in early 2008, projected the current tumultuous economic downturn and its impact on Hawaii residents? If we can't even project an economic picture in the near term, what confidence can anyone have on economic projections 20 years from now?
02/20/2009	This is part of an email I sent to The Bus today regarding an outstanding driver. The ending below evolved into suggestions on how The Bus can better itself and thus eliminating the need for a rail system on O'ahu. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback. As a rider of The Bus for about 3-1/2 years now, even with the unaccountability of The Bus, I am not a fan of the rail for many reasons (though I was when the idea was first introduced way back). 1) O'ahu is too small for such a system, 2) The route is taking homes away from people, 3) By the time the rail is

Submission Date	Submission Content/Notes
	<p>completed, O'ahu will have a different traffic problem, 4) The traffic congestion due to the construction and re-routing of highways, would double while it's taking 10 years or so build, 5) the money could be better used by the public transit authority by hiring better mechanics for The Bus and upgrading the bus vehicles, 6) Trainings for The Bus personnel on several things such as sensitivity, tactfulness, and smiling, 7) Better driver trainings - not teaching how to overtake cars, and last but not least, 8) Stressing to The Bus drivers about accountability - sticking to the time schedule and not rushing to complete their route as everyone depends on them! I've heard, and experienced, many times where the bus is never at the designated stop on time, even when one arrives at least 10 minutes earlier than the schedule notes. Sometimes waiting an hour, when the bus is scheduled to arrive every 20 minutes, for the next bus. I believe with these changes in attitude and assets, Hawaii could have a really nice bus system as other states do, without the ugly rail system. Keep Hawaii beautiful! Mahalo!</p>
02/20/2009	<p>I am opposed to the rail going along any stretch on ocean frontage. The view of the ocean has been a major concern in recent development projects and should be one for the rail. The current route taking the rail down Nimitz across to Halekauwila uses street that are too narrow, block the ocean and does not go into the middle of the business district of Downtown. A better alternative would use Dillingham to King throughfare currently used by business traffic and impose little impact on residential properties. Placing the rail needlessly in residential areas creates extra costs to acquire land, impacts the quality of life and does not serve the population using the rail. Studies prove that areas around the stations are impacted by noise, littering and destruction of property. Following a business route would ensure little impact is felt by the environment, costs of acquiring land and ensure the road ways are wide enough to accommodate the rail system. I support rail, but do not support the current route due to impact on the environment and residential quality of life.</p>
02/19/2009	<p>We really appreciate all the effort you are putting forth toward the mass transit system that we hope will do many wonderful things for Hawaii residents. One suggestion I'd like to make is regarding the current newsletter we receive in the mail. Perhaps in support of the Department of Environmental Services as well the island of Oahu- in which we live and love ---please consider or switch to using recycled paper for your newsletters or just a plain white paper. The glossy paper that your newsletters are printed on are not recyclable. We are not able to deposit your newsletters to our pile that goes to the Opala Bins. Thank you for your time.</p>
02/13/2009	<p>The vehicle description is 200' electric on steel wheels. Are these to be "Heavy Rail" like the BART cars, or "LRV " like the Salt Lake City cars? Does the 200 feet long cars imply that the vehicles will be articulated? How many cars</p>

Submission Date	Submission Content/Notes
	will eventually be required for the system?
02/12/2009	Being an owner at 215 N. King I'm concerned about the closeness to our building and noise. Your website talks about noise at the street level, and how short walls will direct the noise up. Those of us who live up, do not see this as good news. Perhaps it should go underground in the downtown and residential areas.
02/09/2009	It is very exciting to see another area step forward and venture into rail transportation. Having been in the heavy freight and transit rail for over thirty plus years I have seen many systems put in place and all have been sucessful. It is my opinion that Honolulu and the area served will benefit greatly.

*List of comment submissions do not include right-of-way questions, procurement questions, or mailing list requests.

KITV.com

Transit Opponents Push Hannemann Impeachment

Mayor Says Vote Supported Transit, His Leadership

POSTED: 9:52 pm HST January 2, 2009

HONOLULU -- Anti-rail critics on Friday launched a campaign to impeach Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann.

The mayor's priorities remain city services, the economy and a rail system for Honolulu.

However, rail opponents who failed to convince voters to block the transit system at the polls are trying another tactic.

In a small private swearing-in ceremony at Kapolei Hale, the mayor began the work of his second term, thanking his cabinet members and senior staff for their hard work and support.

"It's all about doing the work of the people," Hannemann said.

The group that has butted heads with the mayor over his work getting a rail system off the drawing board and on the ground hopes to collect 5,000 signatures to impeach him. Group members said they believe Hannemann misled the community about what a transit system will do for the city.

Related To Story



• **Video: Anti-Rail Critics Launch Mufi Impeachment Campaign**

They maintained that the mayor has committed constructive fraud by using taxpayers' money to force a rail system on those who do not want it.

"This is not sour grapes. People were lied to leading up to a vote on the largest public works project in Hawaii. They deserve to know the truth," Impeach Mufi Chairman Eric Ryan said.

The mayor said he believes the results of the election speak for themselves.

"People have reaffirmed the job that we do at City Hall. The majority of people like what we are doing and at the end of the day that's what counts," Hannemann said.

Those pushing the petition drive said they hope to be able to collect the signatures they need in a month's time.

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January 3, 2009

Honolulu rail enters defining year that could reshape plan, route

Environmental study, route debate may delay schedule, increase cost

By Sean Hao

Advertiser Staff Writer

In about a year, Mayor Mufi Hannemann and other city leaders will gather in an East Kapolei field for the start of construction on the state's largest-ever public works project.

Or the city's ambitious timetable to start building a \$5.3 billion train line could be derailed by a lengthy environmental impact review, buried under mounting financing concerns or tied up in lengthy land condemnation proceedings.

Either way, this year will play a big role in determining whether the project stays on schedule, with limited service beginning between West Loch and Waipahu in late 2013, and full service between East Kapolei and Ala Moana Center starting by 2018.

More political consensus is expected this year because residents voted for rail in November. However, there still will be many hurdles to overcome — the biggest being completion of the environmental study.

More immediate barriers include choosing the route of the 20-mile line and fixing a technical problem that's preventing the city from soliciting construction bids for the train project. The city is expected to debate both issues next month.

This year, the city also needs to start finalizing project engineering and management plans and begin acquiring land for the train's right of way.

Wayne Yoshioka, director of the city Department of Transportation Services, said the city's schedule is ambitious, but doable. The city hopes the aggressive schedule will save it money by reducing inflation's impact on labor and material costs.

"It really is about saving money," Yoshioka said. "If you look long-term on the project ... every month we extend the project costs us \$10 million."

A public comment period on the draft environmental impact study ends Feb. 6. The city must respond to those comments in its final study, which it hopes to complete about July. Federal approval of that study, a so-called record of decision, is scheduled to occur soon after. The city cannot begin construction without that approval.

Whether construction starts in December also hinges on the city awarding a design/build contract for the elevated guideway that will carry the train, and deciding whether the train will go through Salt Lake as planned or shift to the airport area.

A debate over the route already has prevented the city from starting preliminary engineering, which is a major step toward securing an estimated \$1.2 billion in federal funding.

During preliminary engineering, the city will finalize management plans; refine the route's alignment and project costs; and identify benefits and impacts.

After preliminary engineering is done, which usually takes 15 to 30 months, transit projects enter the final design phase, according to the Federal Transit Administration. If the project passes that phase, the FTA provides a full-funding grant agreement.

The city expects to be awarded full federal funds in spring 2011.

Other issues that need to be addressed during the coming year include development of land use regulations and zoning codes around train stations, approval of a project budget for the next fiscal year and initiating the land acquisition process.

'a lot of intangibles'

The timing of the completion of many objectives isn't entirely in the city's control.

"There are a lot of intangibles," said City Councilman Donovan Dela Cruz. "There are other things outside of the city that we have to depend on like federal approvals and state land exchanges.

"It's going to be difficult to pinpoint" where problems could occur, Dela Cruz said. "You really need A, B, C and D to line up all at the same time — that's a lot of balls to be juggling all at the same time."

Councilman Gary Okino was optimistic the city would start construction as planned in December 2009.

"I think so. I hope so," Okino said.

One of the project's biggest immediate hurdles is fixing a technical glitch preventing the solicitation of proposals to begin construction of the first phase, Okino said.

The original 2006 ordinance authorizing the city to build the train requires the administration to seek council approval before soliciting proposals to build the train system. That was added as an attempt to keep the council and public informed about key project details.

However, that provision also violates state procurement laws, according to the state Procurement Office.

Bill 63 would eliminate that provision and allow the city administration to seek construction proposals without council approval, but that issue also isn't expected to be resolved until late January at the earliest.

Okino said he does not expect the environmental impact review to be a problem for the city.

The environmental study "basically is just to disclose the potential impacts and what measures can be taken to address those impacts," Okino said. "I feel optimistic that we're going to pass that hurdle. Basically, it shouldn't be something that stops the project."

Project opponents think otherwise. Anti-rail Web site Honolulutraffic.com wants the federal government to force the city to reconsider alternatives to an elevated rail, including building an elevated, managed lane highway.

Cliff Slater, chairman of the Web site, also thinks the city is making a mistake by starting construction in East Kapolei rather than Honolulu's urban core.

"I can't see them getting away with that," Slater said. "I just think that they're going to have to do a supplemental draft, and the supplemental draft is going to take them a year or more" to complete.

Councilman Romy Cachola said he's unsure whether the city can stick to its timetable.

"It's a very optimistic timeline. We still have a long way to go," he said.

building consensus

One of the biggest unresolved concerns is whether the East Kapolei to Ala Moana route should traverse Salt Lake as planned or pass by the airport. Early next year, the council is expected to switch to the airport.

However, Cachola said he'll continue to push to keep the route through Salt Lake, which is part of his district.

The Salt Lake community successfully lobbied for the current route in early 2007. That's when Cachola cast a swing vote to keep the rail project alive, if it went through Salt Lake rather than the airport.

According to the city's draft environmental impact study, a commuter rail system that runs past Pearl Harbor and the airport would cost more to build and maintain, but carry more passengers and alleviate more traffic, according to the city's draft environmental study. The change would add about \$220 million to the project's \$5.3 billion price tag.

Cachola also said he'd push to get the city to consider starting construction of the train in the city, where ridership would be highest and the need for subsidies would be lowest.

"If they plan to start at the other end — East Kapolei to Waipahu — I really have concern because it will put taxpayers' pocketbooks on the line," Cachola said. "Once you finish that portion, who's going to ride? How much will be the taxpayer subsidy?"

According to the city, the start of the project's first phase is tied to the location of a maintenance and storage facility, which may be placed between Leeward Community College and Waipahu High School.

Starting construction at that facility and proceeding in Ewa also takes advantage of the fact that construction along Farrington Highway and in West O'ahu will not require significant utility relocations, according to the city.

Council members agreed that 2009 will see continued debate and some lingering divisiveness surrounding the train project.

"We're really going to have to work hard to build consensus because there's still some ideas and differences on how the implementation is going to occur," said council member Dela Cruz.

Dela Cruz cautioned that the city should not try to force the project ahead too quickly.

"The public voted to move forward," he said. "From the council standpoint, we just want to make sure we move forward in a responsible manner. It's so important to do it right instead of rush. A mistake could cost three times as much."

Additional Facts

Rail timeline

February 2009: Issue request for proposals on design/build contract for project's first phase

Summer 2009: Release of final environmental impact statement

Fall 2009: Federal approval of environmental impact statement

Fall 2009: Award design /build contract for first phase

December 2009: Start construction of elevated guideway

Spring 2011: Full funding grant approval from federal government

November 2013: Start service between West Loch and Waipahu

Late 2018: Start full service between East Kapolei and Ala Moana

Source: City & County of Honolulu

January 4, 2009

Councilman learns ropes of city transit

By Mary Kaye Ritz
Advertiser Staff Writer

Editor's note: The Island Life section is challenging O'ahu folks to live a more environmentally friendly life. Previous stories have focused on a diet emphasizing local foods, cutting back on trash and going vegetarian. Now, look at a week without being a single passenger in a car.

Taking up the challenge: Honolulu City Council's own Nestor Garcia, chairman of the Transportation and Public Works committees. Here's how he fared.

When Councilman Nestor Garcia first considered the challenge of going a week without using his car, he was intrigued.

After all, he takes calls from his constituents about TheBus, attends transit meetings and had always wanted to try TheBoat. A week without using his car? Why not?

Then, at the bright and early hour of 7:30 on the first morning of the challenge, after walking about a half mile to the bus stop, Garcia was jingling eight quarters in his hand and staring at the bench.

"I'm at the bus stop, waiting for TheBus, and I can't sit because it's wet," he told a reporter from his cell phone.

Not the most auspicious beginning to what he hoped would be a chance to see firsthand what it means to carpool, plan ahead with bus schedule in hand, and get some extra exercise through The Advertiser's Go Green challenge.

He felt acutely what his mother, who works at Watumull's and relies on TheBus to commute, and all those disgruntled riders had griped about to him in the past.

Still, when the week was done, he was pleasantly surprised.

"The best part was, I found bus drivers to be courteous and helpful, especially with what they're asked to put up with," said Garcia, who also enjoyed eschewing traffic and having a little downtime — when he could get a seat.

He was pleased to learn TheBus follows its posted schedule and offers a convenient way to get around the island.

That's the case even when weather is inclement, some of the fleet's 525 buses face repairs and ridership rises with gas prices, he said. (Even now, Garcia reports, ridership remains elevated.)

Garcia gave himself a few rules: He'd pay full fare (council members get free bus passes) and could

carpool if someone was going that way anyway.

Along the route, he gained a new appreciation for teenagers' gadgetry.

"Thank God for earphones," he said, "and those portable MP3s, now. In the old days, you had boomboxes. Now, we don't have to share their music."

THE 'trip to Mordor'

Even with a few boat trips that afforded some beautiful scenery and seemed fairly comfortable (or, as he put it, "not as choppy as I thought it would be"), not all was smooth sailing.

There was Tuesday, or "The Trip to Mordor," as Garcia called it.

First, he took TheBus to TheBoat, and walked to work. That took almost three hours.

After a long day that included a trip to Kapolei for an afternoon meeting and a bus ride home, his daughter called. She needed him to bring over a piece of paper she'd left at home. Stat. And she was at Pearlridge. That's another 40 minutes and two buses.

"I was tempted" to turn the key in the car, Garcia admitted. But he didn't.

However, he did call in the next morning, to make sure aforementioned reporter got the full blow-by-blow.

"I feel like a parolee, checking in," Garcia said with a laugh.

Then there was the evening he would have needed to wait an hour for the 10 p.m. bus, and decided to take the approximately 40-minute trek uphill from the transit center to his house.

"Good thing it was a cool night," he said.

WORKOUTS OPTIONAL

A plus: Garcia could bypass the gym for the week, since he was doing a lot of walking.

Oh, and he learned the joy of Google Transit, which helps plot trips with TheBus, including estimated travel times.

What else did he learn?

"You have to be extra vigilant about plans, like what time you leave the house," he said. "And to watch the weather first thing.

"Pack for the day — umbrella, jacket. You really need to be aware of what you bring along. Once you leave the house, you're committed for the day. In a car, you can always make a U-turn."

Oh, and to wear comfortable shoes.

Before, he'd take TheBus occasionally, and still will.

"Ours is one of the best in the country," he said. "I want to make sure it lives up to its reputation."

Additional Facts

300

Average daily passengers on TheBoat

82,948

Average daily peak* riders of TheBus (in the city)

36,328

Average daily peak* riders (in suburban Leeward)

16,943

Average daily peak* riders (Central O'ahu)

10,885

Average daily peak* riders (Windward)

\$360**

Average monthly savings if you took TheBus from Pearl City or Hawai'i Kai to Downtown daily.

* Peak hours are 2 to 6 p.m.

** Assumes \$40 bus pass vs. \$250 in gas and \$150 in parking. You'd likely save even more: This calculation doesn't include associated car expenses, such as maintenance and insurance.

■

January 4, 2009

Nestor Garcia's transportation diary

Nestor Garcia shared his transportation diary for the week he went without turning the key in his car:

Dec. 15

7:20 AM left home to walk to bus stop.

7:40 caught No. 433 at Waikele Shopping Center.

8:10 caught No. E Express at Waipahu Transit Center.

8:40 arrive Bishop and Hotel.

8:50 in office.

3:15 PM left office to walk to Aloha Tower.

3:35 arrive Aloha Tower.

3:55 boat departs Aloha Tower (more than 40 on boat).

4:55 arrive Kalaeloa Ferry Terminal.

5:00 board No. F13 to Kapolei Transit Center.

5:10 arrive Kapolei Transit Center.

5:59 board No. 40 to Waipahu Transit Center.

6:23 arrive Waipahu Transit Center.

6:40 arrive Waikele Shopping Center.

6:50 arrive home.

Notes: always wear comfortable walking shoes! Also, now that I find myself more as a pedestrian, I need to be more mindful about watching out for cars at intersections where I cross the street.

Dec. 16

Little did I know that this would be truly hectic!

6:10 AM left home to walk to bus stop.

6:43 caught No. 433 at Waikele Shopping Center.

7:02 arrive Waipahu Transit Center.

7:06 caught 40A to Kapolei Transit Center.

7:25 arrive Kapolei Transit Center.

7:29 caught No. 4 13 to Kalaeloa Ferry Terminal.

7:44 arrive Ferry Terminal.

8:00 depart Kalaeloa (about 25 people onboard).

8:55 arrive Aloha Tower.

Note: the boat ride is not bad at all! People warned me that morning ride could be queasy. I took seasickness pills and wore bands just in case.

9:30 arrive City Hall on foot (after stop at Starbucks).

11:55 leave City Hall.

12 noon arrive 415 South Beretania stop.

12:12 caught Country Express No. C Makaha to Kapolei Transit Center West.

12:52 arrive Kapolei Transit Center West.

12:57 Zippy's Kapolei for lunch.

2:00 Kapolei Chamber meeting.

4:25 caught No. 40 at Kapolei Transit Center East.

4:53 arrive Waipahu Transit Center.

5:13 caught No. 433 to Waikele Shopping Center.

5:27 arrive Waikele Shopping Center.

5:37 arrive home.

Note: Blind bus customers would like more frequent bus service in outlying areas.

Emergency! Need to do errand for daughter.

6:20 leave home on foot.

6:30 caught No. 433 at Waikele Shopping Center.

6:35 arrive Kamehameha Highway and Lumiauw Street stop.

6:42 caught No. 62 to Pearlridge Shopping Center (only one on bus between Leeward Community College and Pearlridge!).

6:58 arrive Pearlridge. Wife meets me here after her board meeting Downtown ends.

Note: after dinner, wife drives us home. Whew!

Dec. 17

Spent day with staff in Waipahu to review storm damage along Waipahu Street.

Dec. 18

Carpool to and from work Downtown.

Dec. 19

Carpool to and from work.

Note: took in blessing of new city ferry boat, Catalina Adventure. It was mentioned that the city averages about 300 total passengers a day on the boat.

Dec. 20

Not much to do today. Wife drops me off and picks me up for Waipahu Christmas parade. Note: My ride in the parade is someone with Corvette Club. Little do people know that I have relied heavily on public transportation.

Dec. 21

Daughter drops me off on Kapolei for annual Christmas Light Parade. Turned down two offers for ride home, so ...

8:42 caught No. 40 at Kapolei Transit Center East.

9:02 arrive Waipahu Transit Center, Next bus (No. 433) at 10, so I decide to walk home. The walk is all uphill at a slight grade. It is a cool night. As I cross the Manager's Drive Overpass, I noticed that the three street lights on East side of bridge are out. The walk takes about 25 minutes.

9:46 arrive home.

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Letters to the Editor

For Sunday, January 4, 2009

Detractors elsewhere also wrong about rail

I just read about the new rail line operating in Phoenix that has residents there excited. The new line is attracting significant real estate development along its route and boosting the economy. Detractors said it wouldn't work because Phoenix is too spread out, people love their cars too much, it's too hot during the summer, it's too costly and so on.

We have our own detractors here who predict that Honolulu's system won't work because it's too expensive and people won't use it. They too will be proved wrong once our rail system is up and running. We voted for rail and we've made a good decision.

Mike Chang
Honolulu

January 5, 2009

Phoenix rail offers look into future for Honolulu

Advertiser Staff and Wire Services

Honolulu residents have at least five years to wait before a planned \$5.3 billion elevated commuter train launches service.

However, a preview of what to expect can be found in Phoenix, where a new \$1.4 billion, 20-mile light rail train launched service over the holidays.

More than 150,000 people rode the new light-rail trains that rolled out last weekend. Service between Mesa and downtown Phoenix started Saturday, Dec. 27. By Tuesday, the ground-level train had its first accident with an auto.

The launch of train service culminated more than a decade of planning. Service started on a cold Saturday morning precisely at 10 a.m. when trains carrying passengers started rolling down the tracks.

At stations all along the line, passengers lined up with video and cellphone cameras to record the moment.

"I've been waiting for this day like a kid waiting for Christmas," said Janine Roumain of Tempe.

A native of Chicago, Roumain expects transplants from other big cities will gravitate to the mass-transit system.

"Students, poor people, older people, tourists — this will appeal to all sorts of groups," she said.

When the trains started running, they worked almost perfectly — but the lines remained long. A police officer in Mesa estimated that the line to get on was approximately 2 1/2 hours around noon the first day.

At the other end, near the Christown Spectrum Mall, the line was approximately 90 minutes at midday.

Riders would get on the train at one end and ride it all the way to the other, a trip that takes an hour and 25 minutes.

Others used the train as an excuse to bar-hop in downtown Phoenix, meet friends for lunch on Mill Avenue or take a trip to Mesa.

Holly Pearson of Tempe and friend Travis Sealock of Chandler rode the train from Tempe to Central Avenue in Phoenix to share a meal at Matt's Big Breakfast.

"For three years I've been watching it be built," said Pearson, who lives near the line on Apache Boulevard. "I had to see what it was like."

Riders appeared to be enjoying themselves.

They cheered when they crossed Tempe Town Lake, they pointed at things they were seeing from a new perspective and kept smiling even as they stayed crammed together for the entire ride.

The light-rail project began gathering steam in 1996, when Tempe voters passed a transit tax.

Phoenix voters followed in 2000, setting the stage for the federal government to approve a \$587 million grant for the project.

Honolulu's train will be financed by a 12.5 percent hike in the general excise tax for 15 years. That's expected to raise more than \$4 billion, which is expected to be augmented by \$1.2 billion in federal grants. Groundbreaking for Honolulu's train is expected to occur in December 2009, with limited service starting by 2014. Full service between East Kapolei and Ala Moana is expected to begin by 2019.

A groundbreaking ceremony for the Phoenix rail occurred in February 2005. It marked the start of nearly four years of construction that hurt businesses and forced lengthy lane closures on major arterial streets.

It also created hundreds of jobs and spurred significant redevelopment efforts along the line. Tempe attributes \$4 billion in projects to light rail's influence.

The Dec. 27 opening had officials breathing a sigh of relief and promising great things to come.

"Everyone's talking about how much fun this is and how exciting it is. But we all know that this is not a Disneyland ride," said U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz. "This is the first phase of a light-rail system that will help us reach a shared vision of an ... economically vibrant urban corridor."

Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon, a strong light-rail advocate since coming into office, bounded out of a rail car and began shaking hands at Third and Washington streets in downtown Phoenix.

"They said this was a folly," a triumphant Gordon told the crowd. "They said it shouldn't be built. ... Today, you don't hear or see many of those individuals. ... Now more than ever, you've seen how it's created thousands of well-paying jobs."

On Dec. 28, a Sunday, riders waited in long lines at both ends of the boarding stations in Phoenix and Mesa, but the wait wasn't as bad as Saturday when the trains debuted.

By Tuesday the train was involved in its first accident.

It was a minor crash, but it still startled passengers and caused delays along the train route.

According to police, a Honda crossed the tracks near First Avenue and Jefferson Street and hit the train. The driver fled, and the incident was being treated as a hit-and-run.

The Arizona Republic contributed to this report.

A new year, new wackiness on rail

January 6th, 2009 by David Shapiro

I've had little interest in writing about the asinine attempt to impeach Mayor Mufi Hannemann a few days into his second term for allegedly using public money to lie to voters about rail transit in the fall election.

But I've been getting e-mails from advocates of the impeachment urging me to say something, so how about this: It's the first truly imbecilic idea I've heard in 2009.

The effort is malicious, totally without merit and serves no constructive purpose; some of the people behind it are the same ones who compared Hannemann to Osama bin Laden in the election campaign.

Imagine that, likening building a train to crashing airplanes into the World Trade Center and Pentagon and killing more than 3,000 people. Talk about folks in need of a little sane perspective.

If Eric Ryan, John Carroll and Co. manage to collect the 5,000 voter signatures needed to get their case before the Circuit Court, the judge should send their okole bouncing out the door before they get comfortable in their seats.

Hannemann beat Ann Kobayashi and voters approved the \$5.3 billion rail plan by comfortable margins in fair elections, and it's time for the community debate to shift from whether to do rail to how to do it right.

January 8, 2009

Hawaii residents cut back on driving, used 8% less gas in 2008

High prices early on, tourism slump cited for dip through October

By Christie Wilson

Advertiser Maui Bureau

High gas prices, changing driving habits and a decline in tourism contributed to an 8.3 percent drop in gasoline consumption in Hawai'i over the first 10 months of 2008.

Although consumers have been celebrating lower gasoline prices in recent months, the Monthly Energy Trends report released this week by the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism pegs the statewide average price for regular gasoline in 2008 at \$3.759 per gallon, up almost 18 percent from 2007.

The price rise earlier this year was enough to get some drivers to switch their habits, and they seem to be slow to return to their old ways, said Eugene Tian, DBEDT research and statistics officer.

"When prices decrease, it takes some time to adjust. We did see gas prices start to decrease from July, but consumption still decreased," he said.

Since the energy report shows roughly the same number of registered vehicles on the road — about 938,000 — the drop in gasoline consumption from 2007 to 2008 is largely due to motorists spending less time behind the wheel to reduce fuel expenses, Tian said.

"When gas prices increase, people change their driving habits and drive less," he said.

Those changes include opting for carpooling and mass transit, according to Elaine Beno, spokeswoman for AAA Hawai'i.

"When gas prices went up so high, everywhere in the country motorists were looking into and exercising alternatives and driving less, taking transit such as buses and trains," she said. "People also are cutting their discretionary trips and carpooling."

One byproduct of the lower gasoline consumption in Hawai'i is a drop in tax collections. State and county gasoline tax revenues from the first 10 months of 2008 are down a combined \$7.5 million from the same period in 2007.

On the positive side, TheBus appears to be benefiting from consumer worries about fuel prices. Average weekday passenger boardings in November were up 3.3 percent from the same month last year, said James Burke, chief of the city's Public Transit Division.

"We like to think it's because we're doing a really good job, but it's probably both," he said.

Officials said another reason for lower gas consumption is the 10 percent drop in the state's visitor count through November. With fewer tourists, there are fewer rental cars and tour vans pulling up at local gas pumps.

Decline on all islands

Kaua'i had the largest year-to-date drop in gas consumption, with a 25.5 percent decline through October, while O'ahu had the lowest, with a decrease of 5.5 percent.

Gas consumption on Maui was down 9.3 percent and on the Big Island, 10.2 percent.

Over the first 10 months of 2008, O'ahu motorists consumed an average of 23.5 million gallons of gasoline per month.

Motorists on the Big Island used an average of 6.1 million gallons per month; on Maui, 5 million gallons; and on Kaua'i, 2.3 million gallons.

The DBEDT began collecting data for the Monthly Energy Trends report in July, so there isn't much of a historical record to judge the highs and lows in gasoline consumption. Researchers did retrieve information from 2006 and 2007 to provide some short-term perspective.

Tian noted that gas consumption in 2007 dropped almost 2 percent from the previous year, so the 8.3 percent for the first 10 months of 2008 does show a larger decline.

Consumption of gasoline in October decreased a substantial 25.3 percent from the same month in 2007, but officials said monthly figures do not provide a legitimate basis for comparison because they can vary widely, depending on special events that take place during the month, seasonal activities, cruise ship visits, weather and other factors that aren't always evident.

Old habits returning?

The Monthly Energy Trends report also indicates the state-wide average price for regular gasoline in December was \$2.452, down 29 percent from the same month in 2007, but still 46 percent higher than the national average price of \$1.68 per gallon.

Beno said there's already anecdotal evidence that with gas prices dropping, "there's a little more traffic on the road and motorists are driving a little faster again. How fast you drive is the biggest factor in fuel consumption."

The consumption of diesel fuel for highway use was 2.9 percent lower through October than for the same period in 2007, according to the energy report.

The average price for diesel in 2008 was \$4.633, up 29 percent from 2007. That compares with the average national price of \$3.90 per gallon.

In December, the price of diesel was \$4.077 per gallon, an increase of nearly 5 percent from the same month last year.

There also was a 12.7 percent decline in foreign crude oil imports to Hawai'i in the first 10 months of 2008 as demand fell.

Additional Facts

A closer look

Gasoline facts for first 10 months of 2008:

- State and county gas tax revenues down \$7.5 million

- Statewide gas consumption down 8.3 percent
 - Kaua'i consumption down 25.5 percent
 - O'ahu down 5.5 percent
 - Maui down 9.3 percent
 - Big Island down 10.2 percent
-

January 8, 2009

Letters to the Editor

Consult obama

With rail, EPA fiascos, our city needs a bailout

Before our city goes bankrupt, Mufi Hannemann should ask Barack Obama for advice on Hannemann's fixed-rail future fiasco.

Obama at least would approach the dilemma our city is facing with good, common sense.

With the latest news regarding the EPA ruling costing us at minimum \$1 billion, where does Mufi think he'll find the hat to pull the rabbit out of?

Running our city is real finance, not magic, and if we were to use sound judgment regarding fiscal matters, we would take care of infrastructure first, and then we would find out we didn't even have enough money for that!

Rail should be last on our list of priorities, after improving our roadways, bus transit system, corridor to the west side, and sewer and water conduits and treatment.

Recent developments in our economy demand sensible thinking in these changing times.

Reprioritizing is a necessity in each and every individual's lives these days, and should be evident in running our city, as it is in running our country.

MJ Culvyhouse | Kane'ohe

Letters to the Editor

For Thursday, January 8, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 08, 2009

Investigate those behind anti-rail effort

Eric Ryan and the Stop Rail Now group's campaign to impeach the mayor (Star-Bulletin, Jan. 3) goes way beyond "sour grapes." More like vinegar from sore losers. To me, this group has no credibility and is just kicking up dust.

They spread half-truths all through the summer in an effort to mislead the public before the ballot vote. This forced the city to mount a very expensive, taxpayer-financed public information program to correct their misinformation.

The group said the people should decide on rail, but now they don't like the decision. Their new impeachment drive will again cost the taxpayers money to clear the record in court. I think it is this group that needs to be investigated.

Lei Matsuura
Honolulu

Letters to the Editor

For Thursday, January 8, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 08, 2009

Rail foes can't face the fact that they lost

The Stop Rail Now group has really soared to new lows. Their latest tactic to impeach Mayor Mufi Hannemann is just another effort to kill rail.

This is the same group that said "let the people decide." But following the elections, when voters chose rail, instead of abiding by the will of the people they cried foul and continue their anti-rail campaign. They claim to be the voice of the people, but they obviously do not speak for the majority of Honolulu residents, who chose rail and re-elected the mayor on Nov. 4.

Jonn Serikawa
Honolulu

January 11, 2009

4 new rail contracts to cost \$1B

By Sean Hao

Advertiser Staff Writer

The city plans to solicit bids for about \$1 billion in contracts this year as part of an ambitious plan to start construction of an elevated commuter train in December.

The first of those contracts is scheduled to be awarded next month and involves conducting a risk management feasibility study for the \$5.3 billion, 20-mile train, according to a recently released bid solicitation. The value of that contract has not been decided. However, the biggest transit-related contract so far will come late this year and is expected to be a \$550 million to \$600 million deal to design and build an elevated six-mile guideway from East Kapolei to Leeward Community College. That excludes an unspecified amount to cover contingency costs.

Other major transit contracts scheduled to be put out for bid this year include a \$250 million rail vehicle and systems contract and a \$120 million contract to build a maintenance and storage facility. Both contracts won't be awarded until early 2010.

Those procurements are part of a plan to launch limited train service in phases starting in late 2013 and ending in late 2018. The success of that plan hinges in part on whether the Honolulu City Council fixes a glitch that's preventing the city from moving ahead with a construction contract. That could occur late this month.

search for bidders

The first contract that will be awarded will be to conduct a risk assessment and implementation plan for the transit project, according to a request for proposals issued Dec. 31. Interested parties have until Feb. 3 to submit proposals and the city expects to award the contract on Feb. 27.

The chosen contractor will advise the city as it solicits bidders for bigger contracts later this year, said Wayne Yoshioka, director of the city's Department of Transportation Services.

"It's the normal thing you would need to set up for a project of this nature," he said. "If we do get to the point where we start construction, we want to make sure we've got this service on board."

How many companies seek the initial contract along with their identities remains to be seen. So far, the city has awarded three major transit deals valued at about \$108 million. In each instance, only two qualified proposals were submitted. That has prompted criticism the city hasn't done enough to promote more competition.

Typically, the city posts procurement notices on the Internet then provides a one-month window for interested parties to submit proposals. That's the minimum posting requirement for contracts, according to the State Procurement Office. The city won't be varying from that practice with the new procurements.

"Those who are interested already know to be looking (on the Internet), so it's very common for them to know where to look," Yoshioka said.

revising ordinance

Among the companies not expected to bid on the risk assessment contract is New York-based transportation engineering consultant Parsons Brinckerhoff. The company already has been awarded two deals valued at more than \$96 million to provide engineering and environmental studies on the transit project.

Tadahiko Ono, a vice president for Parsons Brinckerhoff, said the company would not be bidding on the contract because that work should be done by a company not already directly involved in the project.

The biggest contract so far on Honolulu's largest public works project ever is expected to be awarded once the federal government approves the project's environmental impact statement. City officials hope that will happen this fall so that construction can begin in December.

The project's timetable also hinges on the City Council fixing a technical glitch that's preventing the solicitation of proposals to begin construction of the first phase. Legally, the city has been advised not to solicit bids for any construction contracts until the City Council alters the original ordinance authorizing the city to build the train.

That measure required the administration to seek council approval before soliciting proposals to build the train system. That was added as an attempt to keep the council and public informed about key project details. However, that provision also violates state procurement laws, according to the state Procurement Office.

alternative approach

Bill 63 would eliminate that provision and allow the city administration to seek construction proposals without council approval, but that issue also isn't expected to be resolved until Jan. 28 at the earliest.

The City Council also has yet to resolve whether the train's route should traverse Salt Lake as planned or be diverted to pass by the industrial airport district.

Under current plans, the first construction deal — valued at up to \$600 million excluding contingencies — will be a design and build contract, which means the team selected only will be responsible for designing and building the first six miles of elevated guideway. That deal will be followed by separate contracts for vehicles and systems and for a maintenance yard.

Currently, the city plans to operate the train system, though that can change between now and late 2013 when limited service is set to begin. Full service is scheduled to start by 2019.

At least one City Council member thinks the city is taking the wrong approach by soliciting several, individual transit contracts.

Councilman Donovan Dela Cruz last week introduced a resolution urging the city to enter into a design,

build, operate and maintain contract for the rail project. One big contract could allow the city to fix the cost of construction early, while placing the risk of cost overruns and delays on the contractor.

"I'm not against the concept of rail," Dela Cruz said. "I'm against how it's being implemented.

"I believe in looking at all the different scenarios across the country that design, build, operate and maintain is the best thing."

The city's Wayne Yoshioka defended the city's approach of breaking up the transit contracts.

"We're doing that to boost competition and participation," he said. "If we do one humongous contract, there are only a few companies that have the wherewithal to go after something that huge. What it would do is reduce the number of firms that would be involved," Yoshioka said.

Additional Facts

WHO's getting the contracts

This year, the city will put out for bid four major transit-related contracts valued at about \$1 billion:

- Undetermined amount to conduct a risk management feasibility study. Contract to be awarded next month.
- \$550 million to \$600 million to design and build an elevated six-mile guideway from East Kapolei to Leeward Community College. Contract to be awarded late this year.
- \$250 million for rail vehicle and systems. Contract to be awarded early next year.
- \$120 million to build a maintenance and storage facility. Contract to be awarded early next year.

■

Letters to the Editor

For Sunday, January 11, 2009

What happens to rail when lights go out?

How would another islandwide power outage affect the operation of Honolulu's proposed rail system?

Consider being suspended in an unlighted train on an overhead track above a darkened Kalihi. No lights, no air conditioning, unable to open the doors and no platform to step onto. Or perhaps, on the third floor of an unlighted station, unable to open the turnstiles and nowhere near your destination.

Hawaiian Electric might be able to boast that 50 percent of the passengers reached their destinations without interruption and that another 25 percent will be home by tomorrow morning, and only a few might be stuck on the train until "sometime tomorrow evening," but will this be acceptable as a "glitch in the system"?

I think not. If an outage can shut down the Honolulu airport and render the highly touted Homeland Security operations a helpless scramble, passengers on the rail would be well advised to carry a blanket and a bottle of water - just in case.

Roger D. Van Cleve
Honolulu

January 12, 2009

Letters to the Editor

Rail transit

Affordable version of train called ride sharing

I voted against a rail system for our community. We have so many pressing issues in addition to traffic congestion and so few resources to address them all. How can we justify spending \$5 billion to solve a problem that people could handle themselves, immediately, and at little cost to anyone? It's called ride sharing, not something that we really want to do. But what, after all, is the train if not a ride-share, albeit crammed into a rail car with 299 other passengers?

We need to be encouraging and assisting commuters to find just one other person to share the trip into town. A taxpayer-sponsored media campaign could be used to change our one-car/one-occupant mindset. This, with appropriate incentives, could provide congestion relief years before the transit system is running.

My idea for a possible incentive would be to make all morning west-bound lanes HOV for about 90 minutes, allowing vehicles with two or more passengers to ride free. Single-occupant vehicles could enter freeways before HOV hours begin, use surface streets, or pay a fee to use the roadway during HOV hours. There are few freeway on-ramps where toll booths would be required, and I think it is certainly feasible to give this kind of alternative a trial run, as we have done with other proposed changes to our way of doing things.

In the meantime, as the City Council progresses with plans for a fixed-rail transit system, I hope they consider Councilman Djou's proposal for building from town out. This way, if we fall short of money, we will not have a giant white elephant sitting on the 'Ewa plain.

Lynne Beckstrom | 'Ewa Beach



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New Highway Contraflow to Cut Traffic Congestion

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By Gina Mangieri

Story Updated: Jan 12, 2009 at 6:32 PM HST

Rush hour commutes could be cut by up to 25 minutes thanks to two major highway projects that also promise jobs and federal money.

A new H-1 contraflow lane and a highway widening at a bottleneck is expected to ease traffic congestion considerably, all while leveraging a lot of federal funds.

A new lane will be added on the H-1 from Radford Drive to the Waiawa Interchange, that makes for additional contraflow volume -- increasing westbound afternoon rush hour capacity by 17 percent and shaving up to 10 minutes off commutes.

Brennan Morioka, of the Department of Transportation says, "Residents have waited far too long for congestion relief on their highways and we simply cannot wait to start."

The zipper lane and the zipmobile will go away. In their place, fixed contra-flow lanes, one of them H-O-V.

In addition to the extra contraflow, the H-1 will be widened from the Middle Street merge to Vineyard Avenue.

"This will help reduce gridlock at one of the worst bottlenecks in the state if not one of the worst in the country," says Morioka.

The additional lane on a short stretch there eliminates the merge with traffic after the tunnel if you plan to get off at Vineyard. That's expected to take off as much as another 15 minutes of commute time in morning or afternoon rush hours.

"It's also going to be saving people money in terms of gas used while standing in traffic, it's going to save money in terms of time," says Representative Marilyn Lee of the House Transportation Committee.

The projects will cost about 155 million dollars, with 80-percent of it covered by federal funds.


"From Nanakuli to Moanalua valley we all are in this together. We share the same single primary corridor which is the H-1, so any improvements along the H-1 will benefit us all," says Dean Hazama of the Mililani Mauka Neighborhood Board.

The contraflow project will begin construction in 2010, and the middle street area widening the following year. each project could take 12 to 18 months of construction time.

An environmental assessment has to be done for the widening after Middle street, and that study will determine which property lines will be affected. The state says owners will receive ample notification.

Find this article at:

<http://www.khon2.com/news/local/37479939.html>

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State Plans 2 Major Projects To Relieve H-1 Traffic

DOT To Add New Ziplane, Widen H-1 Freeway At Middle St. Merge

POSTED: 5:06 pm HST January 12, 2009

HONOLULU -- State officials on Monday unveiled two major roadway projects they expect will relieve traffic congestion on Oahu.

The state announced it plans to help relieve afternoon traffic in the westbound lanes by up to 10 minutes.

"We will basically add an additional lane for anyone in the public for anyone to use going in the westbound direction," state Transportation Director Brennan Morioka said.

The extra lane will stretch from the Radford Drive Overpass to the Waiawa Interchange, a 6.2-mile stretch. The state will use fixed barriers erasing the need for a Ziplane.

Workers will also widen the freeway from the Waiawa Interchange to the Waikele off-ramp to increase capacity.

"Residents have waited far to long for congestion relief on their highways and we simply can not wait to start as it is just unacceptable to allow this condition of congestion to worsen," Morioka said.

The second initiative will impact the H-1 Freeway where traffic bottlenecks at the Middle Street merge.

The Middle Street merge project will add one additional lane from the Middle Street tunnel through the Kalihi Street interchange and off loading passengers at the Vineyard Boulevard offramp.

The state said it is likely it will need to acquire land for the widening of the freeway, but it is too early to determine the impact.

"It's premature to say exactly what we are going to need in terms of land acquisition," Morioka said. "As soon as we know, we will be working with landowners."

The project is required to undergo an environmental assessment.

Construction for the contraflow lane is planned for January 2010. The Middle Street widening project is expected to start in 2011.

Costs for the projects will total more than \$150 million, officials said.

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Letters to the Editor

For Monday, January 12, 2009

Stop Rail isn't behind impeachment effort

Let's clear the air about the misconception that the Stop Rail Now group is behind the attempted impeachment of the mayor. Let it be absolutely clear, Stop Rail Now is not responsible, nor are we involved in the move to impeach the mayor. Further, we are not responsible for the \$1.3 million of taxpayer money that was spent to promote the rail. We worked with donations to counter the mayor's deep-pocket tax money, and with what little we had we did a pretty good job.

We accept the decision of the people and are now involved with the environmental impact statement debate to ensure that the right choices are made before construction begins. We were told these decisions were already made before the vote took place. We were told that everything was in order, including the route, and that the federal money was on its way. Within a week after the vote the route was changed.

Every taxpayer has the responsibility to question the use of public funds and hold all elected officials accountable. It could be that the group who is calling for impeachment is doing just that. Get involved with the issues instead of being a sedentary accuser. Wednesday was the deadline to voice your input regarding the EIS, did you?

Leona Perez
Kailua

Letters to the Editor

For Monday, January 12, 2009

Voters made their choices: Mufi and rail

I'm sick and tired of hearing and reading anti-rail and anti-Mufi rhetoric. What have any of these groups opposing rail ever done for the residents of this island? If they spent half their time and energy helping to pick up trash or volunteering for community projects this place would be a better place to live.

Mayor Hannemann has helped with almost every aspect of improving the living conditions of our community, including trying to help the economy get back on its feet with thousands of jobs that will be created when the mass transit rail system comes on line, not to mention the alleviation of road rage traffic by upwards of 20 percent.

Don't try to resurrect anti-rail sentiment with childish ploys to impeach Mufi. By the way, it isn't Mufi's fault that the EPA is mandating changes in our sewage plants.

The people voted "yes" to Mufi being the mayor again, and "yes" to the rail system in true democratic fashion. Please accept the will of the people and let the good energy of the mayor and the rail system proceed without further delay.

Eric A. Kim
Honolulu

January 13, 2009

3 H-1 projects would reduce congestion, commute times

West-bound traffic, Middle Street merge mess would benefit

By mary vorsino

Advertiser Urban Honolulu Writer

The state aims to shave five to 20 minutes off rush hour commutes with three H-1 Freeway projects costing a total of \$155 million.

Two projects will ease 'ewa-bound traffic on weekday afternoons: adding a contraflow lane and reinforcing the shoulder from the Waiawa Interchange to Waikele off-ramp so it can be used during rush hour.

Another project will add a diamondhead-bound lane at the Middle Street merge, one of the worst bottlenecks on O'ahu.

The contraflow lane, which will be open to cars with any number of occupants, would widen the H-1 Freeway westbound in the afternoon to six lanes from five. The shoulder lane, which officials say might be used for traffic during peak afternoon hours, would make seven lanes.

"This is just one investment that we need to make," said Brennon Morioka, state Transportation Department director, at a news conference yesterday announcing the plans. "Residents have waited far too long for ... relief on their roadways."

federal funding

The federal government will foot 80 percent of the bill for the projects. And in the coming legislative session, the Transportation Department will seek the rest — or about \$28 million. About \$3 million for the widening of the freeway at the Waiawa Interchange has already been appropriated, officials said, though work won't start until August 2010.

Legislators say despite the tough fiscal times, they are confident the projects will be funded, especially because the work will mean job creation and comes at a time when the state is looking to invest in infrastructure upgrades as a way of improving the economy.

And Gov. Linda Lingle said the projects are a bargain, when considering how they'll help residents. "What I like most is the quality of life it's going to bring to people," Lingle said, at a news conference yesterday. "It can't happen a moment too soon."

If funding does come through in the upcoming legislative session, construction on the afternoon contraflow lane would begin in January 2010, and is expected to take between 15 and 18 months. The H-1 widening project at the Middle Street merge, which will likely require land acquisition, is set to start in early 2011 and wrap up in about two years.

heavy commutes

The projects were praised yesterday by Central and Leeward O'ahu residents and lawmakers, who said easing traffic — especially for afternoon west-bound commutes — is long overdue. "From Nanakuli to Moanalua, we're all in this together," said Dean Hozama, chairman of the Mililani Mauka/Launani Valley Neighborhood Board. "We share the H-1 corridor."

And they share the pain of heavy commutes.

The INRIX Traffic Scorecard released in October 2008 said Honolulu has the worst traffic congestion in the nation. Most of that congestion is on the H-1 Freeway, with people from the west side heading into town in the morning and going back home at night.

The report, which was released in October 2008, based its congestion analysis on a so-called travel time index, which shows the average amount of extra time it takes to travel on roadways during peak travel times, compared with off-travel hours. The massive report also ranked the Middle Street merge as the 41st worst bottleneck in the nation, out of 100.

State Rep. Marilyn Lee, whose district includes Mililani, said by far the No. 1 complaint from West O'ahu residents is traffic congestion. "I think it's going to be a huge help," Lee said, of the projects. "For the average person, this is going to be a cost savings."

The west-bound H-1 contraflow lane, which would extend for a 6.2-mile stretch from Radford Drive to the Waiawa Interchange (or the H-1/H-2 merge), could shave five to 10 minutes from afternoon commutes. Morioka conceded that time savings won't last long, because more cars are on the road every year.

Still, he said, if nothing is done traffic will only get worse.

contraflow lanes

Morioka also said that the new contraflow lanes will be a big help in case of an evacuation, when more lanes are needed quickly in a certain direction, and will also help police better monitor the high occupancy vehicle lanes used in the morning and afternoon.

As part of the project, the state will install barriers on two freeway lanes — the existing ZipperLane and the far left lane of the H-1 Freeway west-bound. Those barriers, though they can be moved, will stay up 24 hours a day and will have "gates" for emergency access.

Once cars get into the contraflow lanes, they will not be able to get out until the contraflow ends. That means, Morioka said, police will also have an easier time spotting drivers not following the rules in HOV lanes. In the morning, the two HOV lanes will remain (one for cars with three people or more and one for those with two or more).

In the afternoon, one contraflow lane will be for cars with two or more people.

The other contraflow lane will be for general use.

The contraflow project will do away with the need for the ZipperLane and Zipmobile, which rolls out the ZipperLane for morning commutes and rolls it back after the commute is over. Not using the ZipMobile in the mornings will save the state about \$1 million a year.

Morioka said the vehicle could be used locally. It could also be sold.

relief at merge

Meanwhile, the widening of the H-1 Freeway east-bound at the Middle Street merge could slash from 10 to 20 minutes from commutes during peak morning and afternoon periods.

Right now, it takes about 25 minutes to drive from the Middle Street merge to the Vineyard Boulevard off-ramp during rush hour. When traffic is lighter, it takes about 2 minutes to travel the stretch.

"This bottleneck has existed since the early '70s, and it's only gotten worse," Morioka said, adding the project will benefit residents and visitors.

"Our roads are often one of the first experiences of our travelers," he said.

And if tourists come in during rush hour, he said, that experience includes congestion.

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NEW FREEWAY LANES MIGHT AID COMMUTE

State aims to unclog H-1 freeway

2 lanes will be added: 1 at Middle Street and 1 from Radford Drive to H-2's merge

STORY SUMMARY | [READ THE FULL STORY](#)

Gov. Linda Lingle and some lawmakers expressed support for plans unveiled yesterday by the Department of Transportation to reduce peak-hour traffic congestion for commuters to or from West Oahu.

With developments that include the University of Hawaii at West Oahu and other planned projects in Leeward Oahu, Lingle said, "It can't happen at a moment too soon."

One of the projects will add a lane for eastbound commuters on the H-1 freeway from Ola Lane to Vineyard Boulevard to help reduce congestion at the Middle Street merge.

The other project entails adding a lane for westbound commuters in the afternoon by contra-flowing an eastbound freeway lane from Radford Drive to the Waiawa Interchange.

— [Rosemarie Bernardo](#)

.....
FULL STORY >>

[By Rosemarie Bernardo](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 13, 2009

Commuters going east by the Middle Street merge - labeled the 41st-worst bottleneck in the country

last year by traffic analyst INRIX - would save precious minutes of driving time under one of two proposals showcased yesterday.

State Unveils Two Major Projects To Relieve H-1 Traffic



The projects are expected to relieve traffic congestion on Oahu.

[[Watch](#)]



Motorists headed west on the H-1 freeway in the afternoon rush hour would also benefit.

State Transportation Director Brennon Morioka presented the plans, estimated to shave commuters' travel time by 10 to 20 minutes in the morning and afternoon crushes.

"This is intended to improve the quality of life," said Morioka.

The overall costs are estimated at \$155 million. Eighty percent of each project will be federally funded, while 20 percent of each project will be state funded.

One of the projects involves an afternoon contra-flow lane - a lane to be added on the H-1 freeway for westbound commuters during peak traffic. With the success of the ZipperLane for eastbound commuters in the morning, transportation officials wanted to use the same concept to ease the afternoon commute in the opposite direction.

Currently, there are four general-purpose lanes and a car pool lane. The plan calls for adding a general-purpose lane on the H-1 freeway from Radford Drive to the Waiawa Interchange by using an eastbound lane. Morioka said the project is expected to save motorists five to 10 minutes.

Movable concrete barriers will remain fixed for the extra general-purpose lane and the car pool lane, which means the ZipMobile will no longer be needed to retract and deploy the barriers.

Multiple emergency gates will be installed along the contra-flow lanes.

Dean Hazama, chairman of the Mililani Mauka/Launani Valley Neighborhood Board, said motorists will benefit from the emergency gates that are expected to help reduce congestion should a major accident occur.

The project will be done in two phases. Construction of the so-called PM Contraflow lane will occur in the first phase. The second phase will include widening the existing H-1 freeway from the Waiawa Interchange to the Waikele offramp.

The second proposal involves adding a lane to the H-1 freeway for eastbound commuters to alleviate bottlenecking at the Middle Street merge during peak morning traffic. The extra lane will stretch from the Middle Street merge or Ola Lane to Vineyard Boulevard. The project is expected to reduce trips by up to 20 minutes during the morning, afternoon and weekend peak traffic times.

"This is going to be one of the most impactful and meaningful projects that the Department of Transportation has done in a very, very long time," said Morioka, describing the merge as one of the worst bottlenecks in the state, if not one of the worst in the country.

He noted that the Middle Street merge bottleneck existed in the early 1970s and has continued to worsen.

"Residents have waited far too long for congestion relief on their highways," he said. "We simply cannot wait to start, as it is unacceptable to allow this condition of congestion to worsen over the years."

Six bridge abutments will be modified, and land acquisition on the makai side of the H-1 freeway is planned to make way for the extra lane. Morioka said he does not anticipate any homes to be affected.

Both projects are part of the Department of Transportation's capital improvement budget previously requested from the state Legislature. Senate President Colleen Hanabusa and Rep. Marilyn Lee said they support the plans.

While Morioka acknowledged that both projects are costly, he said, "We've had to make some tough decisions. These are very large, high-priced items, so it is impacting our financial plan. So when we look at the benefits of these two, it's definitely worth doing and needed."

Westbound H-1 freeway contra-flow project

» A lane will be contra-flowed using an eastbound lane, extending from Radford Drive to the Waiawa Interchange, about a 6-mile stretch.

» The extra lane is expected to reduce commute time by 10 minutes.

» Construction date: January 2010

» Completion date: Mid-2011

» Cost: \$55 million for two phases. Eighty percent will be federally funded, while 20 percent will be state funded.

Source: State Department of Transportation

Eastbound H-1 freeway widening project

» An eastbound lane will be added from Ola Lane to Vineyard Boulevard.

» The extra lane is expected to reduce commute time by 20 minutes by eliminating the Middle Street merge, where traffic backs up.

» Construction date: Early 2011

» Completion date: Late 2013

» Cost: \$100 million. Eighty percent will be federally funded, while 20 percent will be state funded.

Source: State Department of Transportation

KITV.com

Mayor Wants Money From Traffic Fines

Hannemann Says Funds Could Offset Cost To Protect Obama

POSTED: 4:17 pm HST January 13, 2009

UPDATED: 4:30 pm HST January 13, 2009

HONOLULU -- Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann on Tuesday renewed a longtime request for Oahu to get some of the state's share of uncontested traffic fines.

This time he hoped to convince state legislators to help pay for extra security costs the city incurred guarding the president-elect during his trips to Honolulu.

For decades, Honolulu mayors have asked the state for a share of traffic fines, without success.

The Honolulu Police Department issues traffic tickets for speeding and other infractions. However, the state keeps all the money from them, because state courts collect the fines.

Hannemann said he wants some of those funds for the city to help offset the cost of police protection for Barack Obama. HPD's bill alone was \$200,000 for Obama's holiday trip to Hawaii.

"Of course, we didn't budget for it, because we've never had this very unique opportunity," Hannemann said.

The city also spent money to keep paramedics in city ambulances on stand-by during Obama's visits in the past year, Hannemann said. The mayor said he expects more Obama trips to the island during his presidency.

"We'd like for him to visit us as much as possible, and that's a great opportunity, but I can assure you that our public safety resources are drained," the mayor said.

The city is also asking state lawmakers to help it avoid a \$1 billion plus bill to upgrade two of Oahu's largest sewage plants after the federal government denied a waiver that allowed primary sewage treatment.

Hannemann wants to force the state Department of Health to update its water quality standards, bringing them into line with federal standards, which are not as strict.

"So the federal government raises the limits on these pollutants and they issue it to all the states. DOH has not adopted that new information, new standards," said Ross Tanimoto of the city Environmental Services Department.

Hannemann also asked the Legislature to establish a loan guarantee program to provide incentives to developers along the rail transit route.

"We really feel that here's an opportunity to really reshape communities, like Waipahu and Kalihi, that are going to be along the rail route," Hannemann said.

The city is also asking the Legislature to repeal the state's administrative fee on rail transit excise tax. The fee us

up to about \$28 million, much more than it cost the state to administer. Hannemann wants that money to go directly toward rail transit.

Meanwhile, the state's neighbor island mayors asked lawmakers to protect Hawaii's farmers hit hard by the economic downturn. Higher costs and lower demand from the visitor industry threaten to put many farmers out of business, they said.

Among the ideas to help farmers is to give them discounted shipping rates.

All the mayors said they did not ask for long wish lists from the state for construction projects because of the down economy.

"In light of what is happening in the state, throughout the state and the counties, the county of Maui actually is not actually asking for any money items this time around," Maui Mayor Charmaine Tavares said.

The mayors are pleading with lawmakers not to further reduce the counties' share of the hotel room tax, which will already be down because of low tourism numbers.

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January 13, 2009

Letters to the Editor

Funds lacking

'Ewa Development Plan severely flawed

When we examine the blueprints to transform Kapolei into the Second City, it stands to reason that both the city and state need to fund more than what they can accomplish. The 'Ewa Development Plan therefore is severely flawed from the outset.

On transportation alone, no monies exist this decade to complete the North South Road from Kapolei Parkway to Keone'ula Boulevard; erect one street light at the intersection of Roosevelt Avenue and Renton Road; restripe Renton Road at Fort Weaver Road to permit two solid left-turn lanes; add a second lane on Kunia Road to access the H-1 Freeway eastbound; require the East West Connector Road be completed through private property; widen Farrington Highway; link Keaunui Drive to Renton Road over the railroad tracks; finish the Leeward Bikeway; and provide for an overpass at the North South Road intersection with Farrington Highway.

This whole exercise to formulate a sound 'Ewa Development Plan is as good as trying to complete a paint-by-the-number-set picture kit without any paint but plenty of brushes to go around.

Tom Berg | 'Ewa Beach

January 13, 2009

Letters to the Editor

Development

Kaka'ako, rail system need better planning

I watch with some dismay the actions of the agencies who are in charge of future development here on O'ahu

I refer specifically to the HCDA with regard to the shape and composition of a redeveloped Kaka'ako, and to the City Council for its backwards approach to the build-out of the rail system.

In Kaka'ako, what is needed is for the community (yes, the community and not an agency catering to special interests) to decide what kind of residential and commercial densities are needed and then to determine the building types best suited to achieve the desired result. (I am quite sure that the present pattern of high-end, amenity-laden ultra-highrises on huge footprints is not the optimal solution.)

As for the rail system, the political deal-making regarding route and stops defies belief. As far as building the leg from Kapolei to Waipahu first, the question simply needs to be asked: "Who is going to ride the rail from Kapolei to Waipahu?" (The answer is: Not too many people are going to utilize this leg, so ridership will be low and revenues virtually nonexistent.)

I don't hold out much hope that reason and the public's needs will be met under current planning regimes, but it would be nice to hope that we could get the politics and money out of these decisions and put the people's needs first.

Jack Arnest | Kaimuki

MidWeek

A Trip Every American Should Take

January 14, 2009

By Rick Hamada

TYSONS CORNER, VA. - My sister recently relocated to Virginia from Florida, so we are visiting her on the last leg of our holiday vacation. Tysons Corner is near McLean, Va., and has a population of about 20,000. It is an upscale suburb with a median family income of more than \$96,000, while Virginia's median income is about \$59,000. Recent real estate reports show the average median price for a single-family home is \$884,303, while townhouses average around \$734,000. Condo sales prices are pegged at \$409,376. It's a pleasant town that shows signs of encroaching development while maintaining a traditional East Coast feel.

A walk around one of the more tony shopping centers reveals a demand for high-ticket items and designer name labels.

Consequently, that market is satisfied with wall-to-wall retailers sporting big names with price tags to match. There's no economic malaise here.

Let me be clear. Comparing Washington, D.C., and its environs to Honolulu demands the invocation of the proverbial apples and oranges. But the interconnectivity of the entire serviceable D.C. area is well-served by rail. I am not privy to the financial details of D.C. Metro, but it works.

I have been an opponent to the rail project at home not because of opposition to mass transit, simply the plan presented (with the associated cost) does not make sense. However, I have been a frequent user of the D.C. Metro line, and for this region, rail does make sense.

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This is our first visit to our nation's capital. We had scheduled a trip with a group of my radio show listeners back in 2001, but the 9/11 attacks negated those plans. I am thrilled that we are able to share with our children the icons of our country. Just being here is a constant teaching opportunity. Zachary is in the second grade, and it's joyful to see him associate what he is learning in school with the images he has until now only seen in books.

There were moments of great emotion for me in D.C. I lingered at the Lincoln Memorial simply awestruck by the majesty of the structure and the imposing figure of the statue. The view of the WWII Memorial, the Washington Monument and the Capitol Building from the steps of the memorial is beautiful. But it was a small, engraved message at the base of the memorial's original steps that stopped me in my tracks. It was the

exact spot where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his storied "I Have A Dream" speech in 1963. To stand in the same place where the call for judging his four children not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character was delivered made a deep impression.

I also was tremendously moved while visiting the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial. To read the names of those who died, etched in black marble, and seeing the thousands upon thousands of men and women who perished in service to their country ... words cannot describe the intensity of emotions when you contemplate the impact on the families and friends of those taken by war.

It took us years, but we made our family trip to Washington, D.C.

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It's a must for all who love this country. Walk the same halls as historic figures with the foresight, wisdom and bravery to afford all of us the opportunity to live in freedom. Immerse yourself in the legendary names like Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Lincoln and Roosevelt. Bask in the glow of patriotism when you see and hear our American flag stand watch over the buildings and institutions that represent the creation and stewardship of this greatest societal experiment in history. Or simply sit on a park bench with the waters of the Potomac lapping against a walkway and share a quiet thought about our lives in America.

We have our challenges; we have our failures. But we also have our triumphs. We have a spiritual resiliency that can never be broken because at the end of the day, we are Americans. There is nothing else I'd rather be.

Find this article at: http://www.midweek.com/content/columns/ace_article/a_trip_every_american_should_take/

January 14, 2009

Letters to the Editor

Public transit

Councilman gets credit for rising to challenge

Kudos to Councilman Nestor Garcia for having the guts to take on TheBus for a whole week. (Advertiser, Jan. 4). I take TheBus or TheBoat five days a week from Nanakuli to work in Waikiki, and, true, it can be challenging, especially commuting from such a long distance.

Being prepared with an umbrella, jacket or sweater, bottled water, something to snack on, your favorite music on an iPod and, most important, patience, is the key for a stress-free ride. The system isn't perfect and does need changes, but for the most part it is good. Now that Councilman Garcia has walked the walk, he's entitled to talk the talk and start to make the necessary adjustments needed.

I also hope that this inspires all of our other political leaders to do the same before making changes or voting on other controversial issues. You will definitely gain the respect from the walk, rather than just talk.

Jacque Taylor-Lee | Nanakuli

Letters to the Editor

For Wednesday, January 14, 2009

Stop Rail Now isn't behind impeachment

Two recent letters mistakenly claimed that Stop Rail Now is involved with an effort to impeach Mayor Mufi Hannemann, but typical of our critics, they are completely wrong. Stop Rail Now is not involved in any way with that campaign but we are still working on the rail issue, analyzing the environmental impact statement and finding many problems with it, such as the lack of any serious consideration of alternatives to rail.

The vote on rail was so close it shows the community is split right down the middle. The vote might well have gone against rail if we had not been outspent 40-1 and if the media did not trumpet the city's bogus last-minute claims that congestion is expected to decrease by 21 to 23 percent in 2030 (Star-Bulletin, Oct. 31). The city's own numbers show congestion will be much, much worse than today's levels, approaching gridlock.

Because of the city's misleading statements and media distortions, the election was not based on truth, so we feel an obligation to continue educating the public about the dangers of rail and to challenge the seriously flawed EIS.

Dennis Callan
Co-chairman, Stop Rail Now

January 15, 2009

Letters to the Editor

Petition

Campaign against mayor, rail is absurd

I am perplexed with the blatant and offensive tone of the people responsible for the proposed impeachment of Mayor Mufi Hannemann.

The democratic process is based on allowing the voters to decide what the majority supports and we did so in convincing fashion to re-elect the mayor as well as support the rail project. It is absurd for anyone to sign this petition and I certainly will not.

Gavin Nishimura | Honolulu

OUR OPINION

H-1 fixes worthwhile even for short term

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 16, 2009

So awful is Oahu's traffic congestion that even when the state is pinching pennies, spending tens of millions for H-1 improvements that promise to cut commutes for just a few years after completion is a defensible plan.

That said, decisions about land use, further development and population growth in the Central and Leeward regions of the island cannot continue to be disconnected from traffic issues. Even as the city moves rail transit forward and as the "second city" concept creates jobs in the area, congestion won't decrease without a different growth model.

The Lingle administration hopes that by 2013, uncorking the bottleneck at the Middle Street merge, adding an exit lane at Vineyard Boulevard and contraflow lanes from Radford Drive to the Waiawa interchange will pare average rush-hour commuting time on the H-1 by as much as 30 minutes.

The federal government will pay for 80 percent of the cost for the projects, estimated at a total of \$155 million. In addition to enhancing traffic flow, Gov. Linda Lingle and state lawmakers say the projects will help boost the economy with new jobs.

That's all well and good, but as Transportation Director Brennon Morioka cautioned, the projects' benefits will be transitory, overtaken as development proceeds in West Oahu.

Residents who face daily traffic hassles will welcome the fixes but should bear in mind that coming and going will always be a struggle as long they take to the roads.

TRANSIT MATTERS

Limited electricity outages won't strand rail passengers

By Jim Dunn and Harvey Berlinere

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 16, 2009

Readers like Roger D. Van Cleve (Letters, Jan. 11) who wonder how power outages would affect Honolulu's proposed rail transit system will find their questions answered on the project's blog, yes2rail.blogspot.com, and in our newsletter's January issue, which will be in mailboxes shortly.

As our newsletter relates, the most likely occurrence is a limited power outage in one or multiple areas along the East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center route. Because trains will draw power from many different points along the route, limited outages should not affect service; if power fails in one area, the system will use electricity from another area to continue moving trains and passengers.

We also are planning for the unfortunate event of a major outage along the route. This would stop train propulsion. In that event, modern rail cars will brake safely as they stop. Trains and stations will remain well lit, with backup batteries providing lighting for several hours. The system's operations center will communicate with passengers via the public address system and intercom and relay updates on the situation.

If power is restored within a short time, trains will start moving again. With a prolonged outage, the operations center will direct passengers to exit the trains and walk a short distance to the nearest station on a clearly illuminated path on the guideway. For those unable to exit rail cars, help will be provided by emergency responders and transit staff.

Passengers will be met at the train station by a coordinated response from first responders and city transportation workers.

Ultimately, prevention and preparation are the keys to ensuring rider safety. Project engineers are developing comprehensive safety policies and procedures with Honolulu's police, fire and emergency services. Research is one of our most important tools; we are closely studying the best practices from other areas. For example, later this month our city's first responders will

discuss these issues with a leader from San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit system who has extensive experience in fire, rescue and disaster planning.

Passenger safety is and always will be a priority with Honolulu's rail transit system.

Jim Dunn is design manager at Parsons Brinckerhoff. Harvey Berliner is interim safety and security manager for the City and County of Honolulu.

January 18, 2009

Letters to the Editor

Traffic solution

Officials need to get serious about planning

It's about time that the state DOT decided to address the west-bound traffic congestion in the afternoon.

However, the proposed solution hardly happens without months of forethought and planning. These are the same months that passed as Honolulu tore itself apart at the seams during the bitter mayoral race.

A press release at this point seems more like an advertising ritual at a time "safely removed" from the election than a real revelation of a solution.

It's time our elected officials at all levels started working for the citizens instead of trying to steal each others' thunder.

Wayland Kwock | 'Aiea

Letters to the Editor

For Sunday, January 18, 2009

Letters to the Editor

For Sunday, January 18, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 18, 2009

City's problems bigger than building rail

Mayor Hannemann, you are quoted in the Star-Bulletin on Wednesday as saying, "We're trying to be as prudent as possible, only spending on things that are essential."

The Environmental Protection Agency is telling you to fix the water system and our roads are atrocious and schools are in need of repair and updating.

The government is cutting back on many things, including education and social services. People are losing their jobs and their homes. The food bank is begging for help, the Salvation Army and many other charities are asking for help.

Years ago we were told that the convention center was "essential," and now it sits empty much of the time.

So, Mayor Hannemann, I must ask you, with 47 percent opposed to the rail and 53 percent for it, do you seriously think the rail is essential? I wonder if the pro-rail would have won if Salt Lake residents had known they would be excluded from the route only days after the vote?

Pearl Bunch
Hawaii Kai

Letters to the Editor

For Sunday, January 18, 2009

Letters to the Editor

For Sunday, January 18, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 18, 2009

Mayor has no choice but to hike property tax

It is crucial that Mayor Mufi Hannemann raise the city's main source of revenue - property taxes. With the city facing a deficit, federal complaints about our sewer system, along with an absolutely necessary rail system and with an economy trending downward, including property values, the only alternative is to raise property taxes. He should double them. Then he should leave office and run for governor - no, U.S. senator. Washington, D.C., deserves a great problem-solver like Hannemann.

Jim Cone
Honolulu

Letters to the Editor

For Sunday, January 18, 2009

Letters to the Editor

For Sunday, January 18, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 18, 2009

Public has spoken on rail - build it

It was disappointing to read the letter from Dennis Callan regarding Stop Rail Now's self-appointed "obligation" to continue misleading the citizens of Oahu about the City Council's selection and the public's ratification of Honolulu's rail transit project. This small, negative group continues to point to the rather startling fact that congestion will actually be worse in 2030 than it is today. What an amazing finding! Commuters throughout Honolulu must be very surprised to learn that traffic is actually going to be worse in the future than it is today. Perhaps that's why the majority voted to support a rail transit solution.

Since the rail is projected to remove tens of thousands of automobiles and reduce the need to add many hundreds of new buses to Honolulu's roads and freeways, can you imagine how much worse congestion might be in 2030 without the rail?

The citizens of Honolulu acted wisely, discarding the non-solutions and tired mythology of the highway and automobile lobby. The public chose rail in spite of the daily free coverage provided by the media of this small, shrill group that clearly opposes both the economic stimulus and job creation of major infrastructure programs and sensible, long-term solutions to reduce congestion.

Michael Schneider
Managing Partner
InfraConsult LLC
Honolulu

Editor's note: InfraConsult is a transportation consulting firm working with the city on the rail project.

January 20, 2009

City leaders not ruling out tax hikes

Officials must find way to fill budget deficit amid increasing costs

By Sean Hao
Advertiser Staff Writer

City officials, like their state counterparts, face difficult decisions in the coming months as they attempt to keep budgets balanced amid stiff economic headwinds. Right now nobody's ruling out tax hikes and fee increases as a means of filling an estimated \$13 million to \$40 million deficit in the fiscal 2010 budget year ending June 30 of next year. Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann has forecast a budget deficit of up to \$100 million in fiscal 2011.

"Nobody wants to raise property taxes and we're all going to work hard to avoid that," said council Chairman Todd Apo.

The city's budget negotiations begin in March, when the mayor rolls out his proposed budget. Fortunately for the city, its largest single source of revenues — property taxes — is relatively stable. Unfortunately, it's a source that's expected to decline as property values slide.

Excluding new inventory and construction, the value of O'ahu residential property dropped 1.4 percent to \$155.3 billion last year, according to the city. The total gross assessed valuation for all real property — including commercial and residential — on O'ahu increased 0.2 percent to \$191.1 billion.

The addition of new inventory and construction and renovations to existing properties helped offset the decrease in residential property values. But that may not be the case if Honolulu home prices fall 30.9 percent between 2008 to 2011, as www.Economy.com, an affiliate of Moody's Corp., predicted this month.

Even if tax revenue remains stable, the city's costs continue to rise.

"Obviously what we'll call fixed costs — things we have no control over — are going up," Apo said. "That's everything from the cost of goods and services to union contract requirements."

Council member Gary Okino said those increased costs, which are partly driven by federal mandates, may drive the city to raise taxes.

"I think there's the possibility to increase tax rates but not increase property owners' current tax bills," he said. "A lot of the deficit is coming from reduced property tax assessments. It's a difficult situation."

Council members currently are hesitant to discuss how to pare city expenses. Last July Hannemann asked department heads to trim up to 3 percent of their operating budgets for current fiscal year 2009, which ends June 30. That was expected to shave \$54 million out of the city's \$1.8 billion operating budget. City department heads, who oversee more than 8,300 employees, have already instituted measures such as suspending city job fairs, delaying filling vacant positions and even using less air-conditioning at City Hall.

need for trash plan

Apart from the budget, there's likely to be a lot of talk about trash in the coming months. That's because the city faces a November deadline to close the 107.5-acre Waimanalo Gulch Landfill. The landfill was scheduled to close at the end of May 2008; however, the state Land Use Commission allowed the city to keep it open until November. Separately, the city is seeking to expand the landfill to remain in use up to 15 years.

Meanwhile, Wai'anae Coast residents, elected officials and environmental activists feel the city should be doing more to expand recycling and H-Power waste-to-energy conversion while attempting to close the landfill.

This year the city is expected to make progress on several solid-waste fronts. The city has plans to expand its waste-to-energy conversion facility and to ship more than 100,000 tons of trash to the Mainland each year. In addition, the city's curbside recycling program is scheduled to expand to several more communities in May, including Waipi'o Gentry, Halawa, Wahiawa, Kane'ohe and Waimanalo. In November, communities from Foster Village to Makiki and Kahuku to Kahalu'u are expected to join the list.

It's hoped those measures will reduce the need for a landfill. Still, what to do with Waimanalo Gulch will remain a front-burner issue for the city.

"That's just going to be a perennial issue," said council member Charles Djou. "We are going to expand Waimanalo Gulch. The people on the west side want Waimanalo Gulch closed.

"It is my belief that we would be able to get more community consensus on the landfill if the city government was being more proactive about an aggressive recycling campaign, if we had a plan for shipping more waste out to the Mainland, if we had our ducks better lined up with what's going on with our H-power plant expansion," Djou said.

City Council member Donovan Dela Cruz said he wants the city to finish developing a long-term trash plan. Mayor Hannemann has said his administration is drafting a 25-year solid-waste management master plan.

That plan "needs to be comprehensive," Dela Cruz said. "It needs to have new technology (and) it needs to use recycling and incorporate increasing recycling as time goes on not just at the home level but in business and agriculture."

sewage issues loom

Longer-term, the city also must deal with a recent Environmental Protection Agency decision to deny Honolulu's request to exempt the Sand Island and Honouliuli wastewater treatment plants from full secondary treatment. That means the city faces the possibility that it may have to upgrade both facilities at a cost of more than \$1.2 billion.

The EPA concluded that wastewater discharged to the ocean from Honolulu's two largest treatment plants does not meet federal water quality standards. However, city officials and some scientists argue that secondary treatment is not necessary because wastewater is discharged far offshore, in deep water at the center of the world's largest ocean.

The city will have to increase sewer fees and seek money from the federal government if it loses its appeal of the EPA order. Barring an unexpected reversal, county taxpayers will have to pay \$800 million to upgrade the Sand Island facility and \$400 million to upgrade the Honouliuli plant, according to earlier city estimates.

This year also will be a key year in determining whether Honolulu's plan to build a \$5.3 billion elevated commuter rail system stays on schedule. City officials hope to begin construction on the 20-mile East Kapolei to Ala Moana train in December, with limited service beginning between West Loch and Waipahu in late 2013 and full service between East Kapolei and Ala Moana Center starting by 2018.

That ambitious timetable is contingent on the city finalizing project engineering and management plans and acquiring land for the train's right of way.

More immediate barriers include choosing the route of the 20-mile line and fixing a technical problem that's preventing the city from soliciting construction bids for the train project. The City Council is expected to resolve both those issues Jan. 28.

The city also needs federal approval of the project's environmental impact study before it can award a design/build contract for the first segment of elevated guideway.

It's important to make progress on these and other issues in the coming year, said Councilman Nestor Garcia.

"With respect to the budget, with respect to solid waste (and) with respect to sewage treatment, if the community feels that we've been aggressively moving on these different fronts, and we're not shirking our duties, I would like to think they would give us that opportunity to deal with these scenarios," said Garcia, who is also chair of the council's budget committee. "We can't afford not to."

January 21, 2009

Lingle administration may seek 'sin' tax hikes, siphon transit tax for year

Advertiser Staff

State budget director Georgina Kawamura today discussed the possibility of increasing "sin" taxes and taking a tax surcharge for transit and putting it into the state general fund as a way to close a budget deficit.

Kawamura, speaking before the Senate Ways and Means Committee and the House Finance Committee, said "there is the possibility of transferring one year's proceeds of the .5% GET surcharge for transit."

Based on the Council on Revenues recent projections, fiscal year 2010 proceeds from the rail surcharge would be \$165.3 million. To make up the transfer, the surcharge would be extended by one year beyond its 2022 expiration date.

Kawamura also discussed adding an additional a one-cent tax on every cigarette or 20 cents for every pack to raise \$10.8 million. Additional taxes on alcoholic beverages of one cent per gallon across all six categories of liquor could result in additional revenue of \$373,000, according to text of her remarks.

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Letters to the Editor

For Wednesday, January 21, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 21, 2009

Obama can help change Honolulu - with rail

Our state as well as our nation eagerly anticipated the inauguration of Barack Obama, a son of Hawaii. He represents change and a new way of looking at our world.

We must also embrace change, and take on a new way of looking at old problems. One of Oahu's decades-long problems is traffic congestion. From what I hear, Obama is a strong supporter of public transit and welcomes a modern rail system planned for his hometown of Honolulu.

To borrow a phrase from our new president, this is change that can happen. And it will benefit all of us.

Joe Lee
Hawaii Kai

January 22, 2009

City balks at raid on rail tax

Plan is a 'money grab' by state officials, says managing director

*By Peter Boylan and Derrick DePledge
Advertiser Government Writers*

City officials were not pleased yesterday with the suggestion that a tax dedicated to Honolulu's \$5.3 billion commuter rail project be diverted temporarily to help balance the state budget.

Kirk Caldwell, the city's managing director, called the proposal a "terrible idea."

"It's ill-conceived, ill-timed, and it's a money grab by some in the square building," Caldwell said, referring to the state Capitol.

Georgina Kawamura, the state's budget director, said one year's worth of proceeds from the transit tax — about \$165.3 million — could be transferred to the state's general fund to help close a budget deficit. The tax surcharge could then be extended for a year beyond a scheduled 15-year sunset to make up the difference.

State Sen. Brian Taniguchi, D-10th (Manoa, McCully), said he may propose that the state take two years' worth of proceeds from the transit tax and then extend the surcharge for two years. And state Senate President Colleen Hanabusa, D-21st (Nanakuli, Makaha), said the state might want to defer the transit tax for a year or more as tax relief for Honolulu residents.

Consumers in Honolulu have an extra 0.5 percentage point surcharge tacked on to the general excise tax to raise money for the rail project, which was approved by voters in November and is set to break ground later this year.

The state has collected more than \$259 million for Honolulu through the surcharge so far.

Kawamura and lawmakers said Honolulu does not necessarily need all that money now so it could be used to attack the budget deficit without interfering with the rail project.

Caldwell questioned why Gov. Linda Lingle or Hanabusa did not mention the tax during recent meetings with Mayor Mufi Hannemann.

"The Lingle-Aiona administration and the Senate president want to reach across the street and take money from the people of the City and County of Honolulu. Why? Because they don't have the guts or the willingness to balance the budget any other way, so let's take it from the greatest economic stimulus project in the history of the state of Hawai'i?" Caldwell said.

council opposition

City Council members, even one initially opposed to the rail project, said using the transit tax to balance the state budget or for tax relief would be a bad idea.

Council Vice Chairman Nestor Garcia said the proposals "deeply concern" him. Any suspension or diversion of the transit tax, he said, could send the wrong message to the Federal Transit Administration as the state's congressional delegation works to secure federal funding for the project.

"I think there are a slew of other initiatives that the state could consider before taking money away from the rail project," Garcia said. "I think it would send the wrong message to the federal government and, given our history, could cause the FTA to doubt our commitment to the project."

Councilman Charles Djou, who voted against the rail project but has worked to improve it after voters backed rail in November, said he does not think temporarily suspending the transit tax would bring much tax relief. He also does not want to see the state jeopardize a project approved by Honolulu voters.

"I do very much support finding some means of relief for the average taxpayer," Djou said. "I think a better suggestion for the Legislature would be to suspend a portion of the GET (general excise tax), or expanding child tax credits."

State lawmakers who represent districts on the west side of O'ahu that are choked with traffic were also skeptical.

"I'm against that," said state Sen. Will Espero, D-20th ('Ewa Beach, Waipahu). "I believe we need to fund the rail system and I'll do what I can to oppose it."

State Rep. Sharon Har, D-40th (Royal Kunia, Makakilo, Kapolei), said she would want to determine what impact, if any, diverting the transit tax would have on federal funding for the project. She said the state should not do anything that might endanger federal money.

"I think we have to look into what all the possible ramifications are," she said.

Djou Should Get On Board

January 22, 2009

East Oahu Sun

It's about time Councilman Djou got on board with rail transit for our island (1/9, "Do Rail Properly"). I hope he sticks to his word and supports building rail transit, something our island has needed for at least 20 years. I may not use rail because I live in East Honolulu, but I have plenty of friends and family who live on the West side who will use rail. They deserve rail for traffic relief, just like we deserved the widening of Kalaniana'ole Highway in the early 1990s.

Rail is a wise investment for our entire island. It will do much more than reduce traffic congestion: it will shrink the amount of oil we import, reduce our island's carbon footprint, our emissions of greenhouse gases and support the development of UH West Oahu into a true university. We will become a much more sustainable island with rail. I voted for rail. I support rail. Now let's build it!


Jonn Serikawa, Hawaii Kai

Article originally appeared on East Oahu Sun | Your Community Newspaper (<http://www.eastoahusun.com/>).

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Suspension Of Rail Tax Could Jeopardize Project

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By Andrew Pereira

Story Updated: Jan 22, 2009 at 7:34 PM HST

STORY SUMMARY>>>

A proposal by Senate President Colleen Hanabusa to suspend Oahu's half percent rail transit tax for one or two years has drawn fire from members of the Honolulu City Council.

"My concern lies with how this will come across at the federal level," said Councilman Nestor Garcia. "The Federal Transit Administration is looking over our application and when they hear talk like this they begin to wonder about our commitment as far as our local funding of the project."

Hanabusa outlined her proposal during her opening day speech of the 25th Legislature on Wednesday. She told Khon2 the goal is provide tax relief as the state grapples with a projected budget deficit of \$1.8 billion over the next three years.

"The main issue as you know is we got such a shortfall and the people are crying for some sort of relief. Everything is on the table and that's a major component."

Since it was implemented in January of 2007 the transit tax has netted \$330.8 million, with the state keeping ten percent for administrative costs. Hanabusa said the sunset date for the tax at the end of 2022 would be extended if a deferral is approved by lawmakers.

Councilman Gary Okino told Khon2 suspending the tax could raise concerns at the Federal Transit Administration, which is considering giving Honolulu as much as \$1.2 billion for the \$5 billion project.

"They've looked at our financial plan and (it) never included anything about even delaying the revenue stream by one or two years," said Okino, "that totally undermines the financial plan."

Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann was in the nation's capital for President Obama's inauguration and has yet to comment on the proposal. However in a statement City Managing Director Kirk Caldwell called it "terrible idea".

"To suspend the collection of the tax when all anyone is talking about (in Washington, D.C.) is building infrastructure and putting our people to work and improving the environment is ridiculous. Honolulu's rail transit project will do all those things, in addition to providing choices and traffic congestion relief for our island's commuters."

And while the idea of suspending the rail tax has been floated in the state Senate, it's not a serious consideration in the House.

"If it is a project with a shovel in the ground already I think we should move ahead and show our support to the county of Oahu," said House Speaker Calvin Say.

However rail opponents like Cliff Slater are reveling in the possibility that a suspension of the transit tax could delay the 20 mile project from East Kapolei to Ala Moana, which Hannemann hopes to break ground later this year.

Slater said any delay would give opponents more time to educate the public. "The one thing we've always maintained is the more people know about it the less they're going to like it."

Andrew may be reached at apereira@khon2.com or ph. 591-4263.

Find this article at:

<http://www.khon2.com/news/local/38202019.html>



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January 23, 2009

\$4B highways plan would set drivers back \$170 a year

Hiking fuel tax 10¢ per gallon among ways to fund six-year project

Drivers would pay on average \$170 more a year on fuel and vehicle weight taxes and registration fees under a state proposal meant to help pay for a six-year, \$4 billion highways modernization plan that would target congestion, pedestrian and road safety and backlogged maintenance.

The state Transportation Department would start collecting the increased taxes and fees, which include a 10-cent per gallon gas tax hike, in approximately two years, when the economy is expected to be improving. Brennon Morioka, state Department of Transportation director, said the increases would be triggered by 1 percent job growth over two consecutive quarters.

Morioka conceded the increases might be tough for some.

But he said tax and fee hikes would be outweighed by benefits for drivers from the massive modernization plan, designed to decrease the number of people killed on Hawai'i highways each year by about 40 and cut daily commute times. The \$4 billion plan would go toward 183 projects statewide, including 76 on O'ahu that total about \$1.9 billion.

"Business as usual is simply not working," Morioka said at a news conference yesterday. "The theme of this plan is basically saving lives, saving time and saving money. We are asking them (drivers) to pay a little bit more and in return we are providing them with more long-term savings."

By the end of the plan, DOT says savings could add up to about \$1,825 a year for someone who lives in Kapolei and works in Honolulu. DOT calculated the savings based on savings in gas, time and vehicle wear and tear.

Several drivers yesterday said they would be willing to pay the estimated \$170 more a year for better, safer highways with less congestion. "You can't get something out of nothing," said Joaquin Borja, who commutes to town from Pearl City. Borja added congestion is only getting worse with each year.

Beatrice Ramos-Razon, of Salt Lake, agreed. She said in addition to congestion, she's concerned about the state of the highways, which she said are often rutted and poorly designed. "The highways are so bad," she said.

She said \$170 is not a lot, if drivers get real results in return.

Dawn Cuccinello, of Manoa, isn't so sure that the increases are worth it.

She takes the city bus, but said lots of folks won't be able to afford any increase in taxes and fees. She also said she didn't think the highways were so bad that they needed anything beyond regular, annual maintenance projects.

backload of projects

Transportation officials said the highways system has a mounting maintenance backlog, which won't be met with annual appropriations alone.

"We need to take a bigger bite out of this mountain of projects," said Jiro Sumada, deputy director of DOT, adding the highways plan is meant to save about \$20 million each year in maintenance costs for deteriorated roads.

"We're trying to spend our money smarter," he said.

Sumada said the laundry list of projects in the modernization plan were identified as priorities after officials examined the state highways system, from how well traffic lights are coordinated to how to improve bottlenecks.

Key improvements planned statewide include:

- \$750 million for projects on O'ahu to increase highway capacity and decrease congestion, including a \$100 million project announced last week to add a diamondhead-bound lane at the Middle Street merge — from Ola Lane to Vineyard Boulevard — one of the worst bottlenecks on the island.
- More than \$12 million on O'ahu for "traffic signal optimization."
- More than \$90 million statewide for bridge improvements.
- Some \$30 million for rockfall and slope stabilization, including about \$10 million for rockfall protection work on Kamehameha Highway in Wahiawa and the North Shore and \$20 million for rockfall work on Hawai'i Belt Road.

The highways modernization plan — which has the support of key Democratic lawmakers — is part of the state's effort to invest heavily in infrastructure as a way of revitalizing Hawai'i's ailing economy.

It also comes as the state is in the midst of a \$2.3 billion airports modernization plan and an \$842 million harbors modernization plan. The City and County of Honolulu is also planning to break ground this year on a \$5.3 billion elevated commuter rail line from East Kapolei to Ala Moana.

Lana'i, moloka'i exempt

State Sen. Kalani English, chair of the Transportation Committee, supported the highways plan yesterday in a news conference, saying drivers have long been calling for improvements and less congestion. He said the hit to drivers' wallets is a necessary evil, given the state of the highway system.

"We had to find a way to fund it," he said.

Gov. Linda Lingle, in the news conference, added that the 1 percent job growth trigger is meant to make sure the tax and fee increases aren't hurting struggling families.

"We know the economy will turn around," she said.

Officials said the proposed increases in taxes and fees will generate an estimated \$174 million annually, enough to cover debt repayment on \$2 billion in highway bonds for the long list of projects. An additional \$500 million would come from federal funding, while the remaining \$1.5 billion is the maintenance and capital improvements appropriations that state highways would have received over the next six years, even without the modernization plan.

The proposed tax and fee increases will be submitted to the state Legislature for approval. The state fuel tax per gallon would go from 17 cents to 27 cents. The state gas tax last went up in 2007 - by a penny.

The state Transportation Department is also seeking an increase in vehicle weight taxes — from 3/4 cent per pound for vehicles up to 4,000 pounds to 2 3/4 cents per pound. Also, motor vehicle registration fees would be increased from \$25 a year to \$45 a year, under the plan.

And the rental vehicle surcharge tax would rise from \$3 to \$5 a day.

Projects are proposed for all islands, except Lana'i. Because they won't be getting as much benefit from the highways plan, English said, drivers on Lana'i and Moloka'i would be exempt from the increases in taxes and fees.

\$4 billion of roadwork ahead

A bill would raise fees and gas taxes when the job market is better

STORY SUMMARY | [READ THE FULL STORY](#)

The most extensive overhaul of Hawaii's highways in history would be fueled by dramatic increases in fuel taxes and fees once the moribund local economy starts to perk up, lawmakers announced yesterday.

State officials noted higher taxes and fees being floated to cover 183 highway projects would kick in only when the economy rebounds with 1 percent job growth over two consecutive quarters - projected to happen by mid-2011.

"We can't afford to do this now," said Gov. Linda Lingle, joined by key legislative Democrats in making the announcement. "Individuals can't afford it. We know that."

The increases would mean \$170 in additional annual expenditures for the average resident, state officials estimated.

But they said they expect that to be offset by gas savings from quicker commutes.

— [Alexandre Da Silva](#)

.....

FULL STORY >>

[By Alexandre Da Silva](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 23, 2009

Hawaii motorists on all but two islands would pay \$170 more on average in state fuel taxes and vehicle fees each year to fund a \$4 billion plan to unclog isle highways and make roads safer, according to a bipartisan measure heading to the Legislature.

On the Net

» The full list of projects is available at the

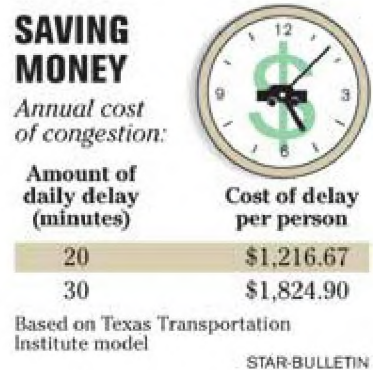
Republican Gov. Linda Lingle joined two key Democratic lawmakers yesterday to unveil a six-year proposal to shave daily commutes islandwide - including up to 30 minutes for West Oahu motorists heading into town - and lower statewide traffic deaths to 100 from 140 annually.

Drivers could save anywhere from \$60.83 a year in gas and vehicle maintenance for a one-minute drop in daily commute time to \$1,824.90 for a half-hour reduction, according to the plan. It spares motorists on Lanai and Molokai from the extra charges because no projects would be done on those islands.

State officials, saying they understand the recession has hit families hard, noted higher taxes and fees being floated to cover 183 highway projects would only kick in once the economy rebounds with 1 percent job growth over two consecutive quarters - a recovery they project to happen by mid-2011.

Lingle said the bill should be passed this year so work can begin as soon as the economy picks up.

 DOT presser



And the state wants to raise taxes to pay for improvements to Hawaii highways and bridges. It says the plan will save lives, time, and eventually money.

[[Watch](#)]



"We can't afford to do this now. Individuals can't afford it. We know that; it's obvious to us," Lingle told reporters. "But we know the economy will turn around. Hawaii will grow again and we will prosper."

State Transportation Director Brennon Morioka warned it would take 30 years to fund \$7 billion in needed highway upgrades if the state continues to do "business as usual."

In 2006, when 161 people died on Hawaii roads, the state had the nation's highest rate of alcohol-related traffic deaths and was ranked near the top for motorcyclists, pedestrians and bicyclists killed.

"The theme of this (proposal) is saving lives, saving time, saving money," said Morioka, calling Hawaii's highway system "broken."

Morioka said taxpayers would be able to check the bidding process for each project, costs and status reports on the Transportation Department Web site.

To fund the plan, the state fuel tax would jump 10 cents, to 27 cents per gallon; the vehicle weight tax would rise two cents per pound, to 77 cents a pound; while the registration fee would go up \$20, to \$45. A rental vehicle surcharge tax would be lifted to \$5 from \$3 per day.

The added fees could last some 25 years, Morioka estimated. The bill also paves the way for a system in which the state could tax motorists based on miles driven since gas tax revenue is predicted to drop as vehicles become more fuel-efficient.

Besides the \$2 billion the state expects to collect from motorists over six years, the highway projects would be paid for through \$1.5 billion it currently gets from the Legislature and \$500 million that would be sought from the federal government.

The bill - which calls for intersections, guardrails and shoulder improvements, rockfall prevention, bridge rehabilitation, road widenings and addition of contra-flow lanes, bicycle and pedestrian projects - also would help create jobs, said House Transportation Chairman Joe Souki (D, Waihee-Wailuku). Other services include roadside alerts to motorists about traffic conditions, safe-driving education programs and a Freeway Service Patrol that would respond to accidents.

"We expect this to be quite a stimulus for the recovery of the state," Souki said.

Proposed road projects

Here are some projects listed in a proposed \$4 billion highway modernization plan being introduced in the Legislature.

OAHU (Total projects: 76, Cost: \$1.9 billion)

» \$600 million: To increase highway capacity at Nimitz Viaduct, Keahi Interchange to Pacific Street

» \$100 million: Middle Street merge widening of an eastbound H-1 freeway bottleneck from Ola Lane to Vineyard Boulevard

» \$50 million: Afternoon contra-flow project from the Keehi Interchange to the Waiawa Interchange

» \$10 million: To replace Hoolapa Stream bridge on Kamehameha Highway

» \$10 million: For rockfall and slope stabilization in the vicinity of Wahiawa town and North Shore

KAUAI (22 projects, \$263.4 million)

» \$62.8 million: For Kaumualii Highway widening

» \$30 million: For a bridge replacement program on Kuhio Highway, Waioli, Waipa and Waikoko stream

MAUI COUNTY (36 projects, \$578.9 million)

» \$186.5 million: For the Kihei-Upcountry Road

» \$175 million: To build Lahaina Bypass Road

BIG ISLAND (27 projects, \$524.7 million)

» \$183.3 million: For Kawaihae Road Bypass from Waimea to Kawaihae

» \$84 million: For widening of Kuakini Highway from Henry Street to Kamehameha III Road

Use of rail fund worth a look, Hanabusa says

Some state lawmakers join city officials in rejecting the proposal

By Laurie Au

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 23, 2009

An idea to redirect funds for Honolulu's rail transit system to help the state make up its multimillion-dollar deficit might have a slim chance of passing, but lawmakers should at least entertain the proposal, Senate President Colleen Hanabusa said yesterday.

Hanabusa briefly mentioned the idea Tuesday in her speech at this year's opening of the Legislature.

City officials immediately rejected the proposal to divert tax revenue dedicated to the rail transit system.

"It's ill conceived," said Kirk Caldwell, the city's managing director-designate. "You have some people at the Legislature and the executive branch reaching across the street into the pockets of the City and County of Honolulu, saying we want to use that to help balance the budget and not make the difficult decisions that need to be made. The voters have spoken, and they want to move forward with rail, not backwards. Here's another attempt to revisit the issue once again."



Colleen Hanabusa:
The Senate president, a rail critic, says she is not trying to stop the project



Kirk Caldwell:
He criticizes state officials for shying away from "difficult decisions"

Hanabusa has long criticized Mayor Mufi Hannemann's planned elevated system from Kapolei to Ala Moana. She said she is not looking to stop the project, but to find revenue to help balance the state's budget deficit of \$315 million this coming fiscal year from July to June 2010.

"I don't understand why there is such an uproar about entertaining it, especially if that means we can get over some of these major humps and we can keep our employees employed with their benefits," said Hanabusa (D, Nanakuli-Makua).

But other state lawmakers say the Legislature should not move forward with this possibility.

"We're looking at projects that can benefit from the federal economic stimulus project," said Sen. Will Espero (D, Ewa-Honouliuli-Ewa Beach). "This is one that has the potential of bringing in

\$1 billion. Why would we want to delay that process that would have enormous economic benefit to the state?"

Over the past two years, when Honolulu began receiving funds from the tax increase, the city has received more than \$250 million. The state is projected to collect \$165.3 million in this upcoming fiscal year.

"My concern was then and still remains to be that we're putting all this money into a fund, and it didn't seem to me to be a wise way of collecting funds from the people to just keep accumulating it," Hanabusa said.



Hickam invited to comment on rail

Courtesy image
A planned route of a proposed Honolulu rail transit system will pass near Hickam Air Force Base. Comments from the base community are wanted by Feb. 6.

Submitted by the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project

Hickam Air Force Base personnel and all armed services members are invited to submit comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for the proposed Honolulu rail transit system. Comments may be submitted until Feb. 6, 2009.

The Draft EIS evaluates three Build Alternatives for an elevated rail transit system from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center and a No Build Alternative.

The Build Alternatives follow identical routes, except by Aloha Stadium, where the:

- Salt Lake alternative continues along Salt Lake Boulevard to Kaneohe Highway, and the;
- Airport alternative travels along Kaneohe Highway with a rail station in front of Pearl Harbor Naval Base, onto Nimitz Highway, past Honolulu International Airport and onward to Kaneohe Highway.

A third Build Alternative includes both the Salt Lake and Airport routes.

The Draft EIS, complete with detailed maps of all Build Alternatives, can be downloaded at the project's website (www.honolulutrainsit.org).

The website also has a video guide to the Draft EIS with key facts, computer-animated fly-throughs of the Salt Lake and Airport alternatives and concept renderings of the proposed rail stations, including the rail station in front of the Pearl Harbor Naval Base.

The public can comment in writing to the Department of Transportation Services at 650 South King Street, 3rd Floor, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813 or at www.honolulutrainsit.org.

In addition to the project's website, copies of the Draft EIS are available for review at State libraries, the City library, the Department of Transportation Services (DTS) office (650 South King Street – 3rd Floor), and the DTS – Rapid Transit Division office (1099 Alakea Street – Suite 1700).

The public comment period is mandated by federal and state laws. All comments received will be considered as the Final EIS is prepared by the Federal Transit Administration and the City. All relevant comments will be responded to in writing.

Call 595-2299 or e-mail info@honolulutrainsit.org.

Lawmakers Want to Use Rail Money Elsewhere



Written by KGMB9 News - news@kgmb9.com
January 23, 2009 06:36 PM

The city and state are both dealing with money troubles and Friday, Honolulu's mayor says transit should not take the hit.

Lawmakers are considering holding on to excise tax money currently meant for the \$4 billion rail system.

That could add up to \$165 million for that one year to help battle a \$1.8 million state shortfall.

The state says it'll pay it back.

All of this happened while Mayor Mufi Hannemann was flying back from Washington D.C. and Friday he says it would be unfair to the people of Oahu.

"How can you go against what 53 percent of the people said in November they want? How do you go back now to the people and tell them, oh by the way, we're going to take that money away because we have to balance the budget," said Hannemann.

The mayor says for the state to hold onto the transit money. Lawmakers would have to go back and change the law and he says those he's talked to tell him there's no support for that idea.



Last Updated (January 24, 2009 06:04 PM)

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Tax, fee hikes for state traffic plan fuel concerns from drivers

Posted: Jan 23, 2009 06:12 PM

Updated: Jan 23, 2009 06:45 PM



William Kraft

By Mari-Ela David - [bio](#) | [email](#)

HONOLULU (KHNL) - A day after the State announces a \$4.2 billion dollar plan to improve roads and highways and reduce traffic, there are concerns about stretching taxpayer dollars thin in an already strapped economy.

What does this plan mean for people's wallets?

\$170 in taxes and fees per year - that's how much more the State says drivers would pay if lawmakers approve the six-year Highways Modernization Plan.

"Registration is already expensive and gas is expensive on the Big Island so I would agree with maybe half of that tax," said Big Island resident William Kraft.

For Kraft's family, who just welcomed a new addition, they say the increases would be a burden.

"Diapers formula, everything else is going up so high, so it's kind of hard," said Carole Wilvur, a Big Island resident.

"Especially nowadays with a recession, a little extra money goes a long way but it's kind of hard to dig deep in your pockets for it at this time," said Kraft.

The costs break down like this:

The state gas tax, up \$0.10 per gallon.

Car registration fees, up \$20, from \$25 to \$45 a year.

Vehicle weight taxes, up \$.02 per pound.

And the rental car surcharge tax, up from \$3 dollars to \$5 dollars per day, all to pay for more than \$4 billion dollars worth



Gov. Linda Lingle

of traffic improvements.



"We have to do something, we have to improve it. I was in favor of rail but it's going to be a long time off so it's not going to make a difference for a while. We do have to improve the roads," said Honolulu resident Lynn Stovie.

And then there's the general excise tax exemption.

"At the end of June of 2009, the GE tax on ethanol blended fuel which has been in effect for the last year and a half, will expire so we're looking at, if they do not continue that GE exemption, we're looking at \$0.08 to \$0.10 per gallon increase come the end of June already," said gas station owner Barney Robinson.

State leaders say in the long-run, taxpayers will save money.

"Save time, when you're not sitting in traffic, you're not using up gasoline, less maintenance on your car because the roads are in much better condition and of course a savings of lives," said Governor Linda Lingle.

The fee and tax hikes won't kick in until Hawaii sees a 1% job growth over two straight quarters.

The proposal still needs approval from the Legislature.

Lawmakers defended the proposed transportation project, saying that everyone has a responsibility.

"The public needs to determine what's more important in fixing their highways that has been neglected for years and suddenly we come down and say we're going to do it," said Rep. Joseph Souki.

"The general public really has to understand that first the fees don't go into effect immediately because we recognize that this is a bad economic time," said Senator J. Kalani English.

If the bill passes this legislative session, state leaders say the earliest the increased fees would take effect is sometime in 2012.



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KITV.com

Tax Increase Pitched For Highway Renewal

Project Would Not Take Effect Until Job Numbers Increase

POSTED: 4:14 am HST January 23, 2009

HONOLULU -- Gov. Linda Lingle and state transportation officials are proposing a nearly 60 percent increase in the state gas tax and big hikes in other fees to raise money for major highway improvements on four islands.

The increases are focused on motor vehicle use. They would not take effect until the number of jobs in Hawaii starts rising, which officials believe will take at least two years. Construction on the more than \$4 billion in new projects wouldn't start until then.

The Republican governor wants to hike taxes by about \$170 a year per resident. The payoff would be a 30-minute decrease in average daily commutes. Key Democratic legislators endorsed the plan and said it would help stimulate the declining economy.

The plan focuses on 183 projects on Oahu, Maui, Kauai and the Big Island.

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PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

In today's Pacific Business News:
Friday, January 23, 2009

Hawaii architects focus on rail, 'green' design and law that went awry

Wording of historic preservation law backs up permitting for old buildings
Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - by Janis L. Magin Pacific Business News

Amending a historic preservation law that went awry, developing Honolulu's proposed rail system and designing sustainable buildings are high on the list of legislative topics for architects this year.

A new law enacted by the Legislature last year requires owners of buildings 50 years or older to submit archival-quality photographs to the state Historic Preservation Division in order to get a building permit. That has caused headaches for homeowners, architects, Realtors, contractors and city workers in the Department of Permitting and Planning.....
(several paragraphs follow on historically significant buildings)

AIA Honolulu also plans to work with the city Council on planning, design and zoning issues that will come up as a result of the proposed rail transit system.

"What we're looking at at this point is a system that is versatile," Nishi said. "We don't want to be locked into an elevated train."

More important is how rail transit will affect city planning and ultimately the communities along the route, and whether zoning allows community-friendly development, Nishi said.

"We feel it should integrate into the community," he said. "It should revive areas of the community. It shouldn't create blighted areas."

The AIA also supports proposed city legislation that would create more sustainable buildings.

While it's possible to have buildings certified as sustainable through a third party, such as the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED program, that often can add to the cost of green construction.

But some places are changing codes to conform to green building standards, which eliminates the need for third-party certification, Nishi said.

The state of California four years ago adopted building codes that are more stringent than LEED certification

"They don't need certification because if you pass their codes you reach a certain level [of sustainability]," Nishi said. "Good design makes it more sustainable."

Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - January 22, 2009

<http://pacific.bizjournals.com/pacific/stories/2009/01/19/daily45.html>

PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

Thursday, January 22, 2009, 2:54pm HAST | Modified: Friday, January 23, 2009, 4:38am

New taxes proposed to fix Hawaii roads

Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - by [Randi Petrello](#)

Gov. Linda Lingle and legislative leaders unveiled an ambitious, six-year plan to upgrade Hawaii's roads by increasing fuel taxes, registration fees and rental-car surcharges that would cost the average resident \$170 more per year.

The \$4.2 billion plan would pay for 183 projects across the state, relying mainly on new taxes that would start in mid-2011.

Officials said the new taxes would generate \$2 billion over six years and would be added to the current \$1.5 billion highway budget and \$500 million in the proposed Federal Economic Stimulus Bill.

State officials said that due to the sluggish economy, the proposed increases would only take effect if Hawaii experiences 1 percent job growth over two consecutive quarters.

Under proposed legislation, the state fuel tax, which is currently 17 cents per gallon, would increase to 27 cents per gallon, generating annual revenue of approximately \$51 million. Vehicle weight taxes would increase to 2 and 3/4 of a cent per pound, generating about \$68 million in annual revenue. Motor vehicle registration fees would be increased from \$25 per year to \$45 per year, adding \$23.3 million in revenue.

The rental vehicle surcharge tax would rise from \$3 per day to \$5 per day, adding \$32 million more a year.

The average taxpayer would pay \$170 more per year, officials said, but that would be offset by the upgraded and expanded highways, which would theoretically save drivers time in traffic.

“The initial investment will bring taxpayers long-term savings,” said Department of Transportation director Brennon Morioka in a statement. “Under current conditions, every 10 minutes of traffic delays on our highways costs each driver roughly \$600 per year, and for commercial vehicles, these costs are magnified to \$3,300 per year. Modernizing our highway system will minimize environmental impacts. It will also reduce stress created by sitting in traffic. This plan is meant to improve safety on our highways as well as enhance the overall quality of life by easing traffic congestion which will save motorists time and money.”

The plan was announced by Lingle, Senate Transportation Chair Kalani English, House Transportation Chair Joe Souki and Morioka.

The plan consists of 161 projects in the four counties: 76 projects on Oahu, totaling \$1.9 billion; 36 projects for Maui County, totaling \$578 million; 27 projects on the Big Island, at \$524 million; and 22 projects on Kauai, totaling \$263 million, as well as 22 statewide projects totaling \$968 million.

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Lingle traffic plan includes 'flyover'

Two lanes above Nimitz could cut up to 30 minutes of drive time

STORY SUMMARY | [READ THE FULL STORY](#)

The most expensive -- and possibly most controversial -- part of a Lingle administration plan to alleviate congestion on H-1 is the \$600 million proposal to build the so-called Nimitz "flyover."

Under the plan, the state would build two elevated lanes of traffic above Nimitz Highway from the Keehi Interchange to Iwilei.

The proposal, which was unsuccessfully floated previously, is already drawing critics who claim the "flyover" would hurt Kalihi-area businesses and be an eyesore.

"I'm glad to see (the administration) looking at traffic alleviation. Then again, the devil is in the details," said state Rep. Joey Manahan, who represents Kalihi and Kapalama. "I'm not sure what the impact in the community will be just yet."

State Sen. Will Espero, who has constituents in Ewa Beach enduring hours behind the wheel heading into town, wants the flyover built.

"I don't believe aesthetics is an issue that should stop this project," he said. "Any time you have a city with a million people, there's going to be concrete, there's going to be buildings, there's going to be projects which must accommodate the masses. This is one of those projects."

— [Alexandre Da Silva](#)

.....
FULL STORY >>

[By Alexandre Da Silva](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 24, 2009

A key part of a multibillion-dollar state plan to cut rush-hour traffic for West Oahu commuters and other motorists is a \$600 million elevated highway through Kalihi that has been opposed by area residents.

The so-called Nimitz "flyover" project would add an elevated two-lane highway along the median of Nimitz Highway. It would stretch 2.2 miles, from the Keehi Interchange near the airport to Pacific Street in Iwilei.

The two lanes of traffic would go into town in the morning and then out of town in the afternoon to alleviate congestion on Nimitz Highway and give commuters an alternative to the H-1 freeway and its dreaded Middle Street merge bottleneck, said state Department of Transportation Director Brennon Morioka.

The flyover is considered a critical piece of a highway modernization program promising to shave up to 30 minutes of drive time each day for West Oahu motorists. If built, it would run parallel to a planned 20-mile rail transit line connecting Kapolei to Ala Moana, going above Dillingham Boulevard.

Mayor Mufi Hannemann believes the two systems could complement each other, according to his spokesman, Bill Brennan.

Morioka said there would be "no conflict" between the two projects.

But some of the old arguments against the flyover proposal -- that it would be an eyesore and hurt Kalihi businesses as drivers would skip the district -- remain, and opponents believe the project, well, just won't fly.

"I don't think they would ever sell flyover to us," said Ron Jones of the Kalihi Business Association.

He said the envisioned system would block ocean views and turn Kalihi into a "ghetto."

Jones also fears its economic impact for retailers, comparing it to a bypass road on the North Shore that lets motorists go around Haleiwa town.

"A traffic jam in Kalihi is bad for other people, but for Kalihi merchants it's a good thing," he said. "Those are our shoppers."

Florendo Juan, a Kalihi real estate agent and carpenter who usually gets caught in afternoon Nimitz traffic, said he would back a flyover as long as it is not too ugly.

Morioka called those concerns "valid" and said they would be analyzed, and possibly mitigated, through an environmental impact statement if lawmakers adopt the bill calling

for the raised highway.

He argued that developments bordering the H-1 and Nimitz Highway essentially make a flyover one of the only ways to give motorists relief.

"We can't widen either of those" roads, Morioka said. "The only alternative is an elevated viaduct that provides more capacity. That is what this would do."

The flyover is among 183 highway projects worth \$4 billion that are being proposed statewide to unclog roads and to make them smoother and safer. But the plan, introduced this week by Republican Gov. Linda Lingle, would be partially funded with higher fuel and vehicle weight taxes and registration fees, costing motorists an average of about \$170 more each year.

The proposed tax hikes created a dilemma for GOP state Rep. Kymberly Pine, who represents Ewa Beach and Iroquois Point, home to commuters who are expected to benefit most from the suggested Nimitz flyover.

"It sounds great, but I just don't support tax increases on the people of Hawaii right now," she said.

But Pine noted some residents "are willing to pay anything" for a faster drive into town.

"It's going to be a balance of those views," she said. "But it's just tough to talk about increasing taxes when everyone is hurting as it is."

Mayor critical of idea to dip into transit tax

[By Rob Shikina](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 24, 2009

Mayor Mufi Hannemann called a proposal to balance the state's budget by dipping into tax revenue for the city's rail system a "harebrained idea" yesterday.

The proposal, made by Senate President Colleen Hanabusa, has no support, he said.

In her speech on the opening day of the Legislature Wednesday, Hanabusa urged lawmakers to consider taking the city's transit tax and using it to reduce the state's projected deficit or give the money back to taxpayers.

In 2005 the Legislature and City Council passed legislation to increase the general excise tax by half a percentage point on Oahu and use the money for the proposed \$5 billion mass transit system.

"Is it really fair for the people of Oahu, who have been paying this tax into a special fund, now to have to balance the budget on behalf of the whole state of Hawaii?" Hannemann asked.

The mayor predicted Gov. Linda Lingle will also oppose the proposal to raid the transit tax fund because rail is a "ready to go" project that can bring in federal money and boost the state's economy.

"It's going to go," he said. "It'll create jobs right now and that's what everybody wants."

He said legislators would have to change the law to tap the transit tax fund for another purpose.

"It's a harebrained idea, and it ain't going to go very far," he said. "It ain't going nowhere."

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Letters to the Editor

For Saturday, January 24, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 24, 2009

Hanabusa has right idea for rail money

Bravo to Sen. Colleen Hanabusa. After she had openly disregarded the financial plight of our state and its residents by asking for a substantial raise for her part-time job, she comes up with a great idea: "to take back the transit tax money given to Honolulu to fund rapid transit." Yes, stop it! Now!

We couldn't have a better way to derail Mayor Mufi Hannemann's rail folly and save us Oahu taxpayers from certain financial ruin.

Thank you, Senator, you may restore your political future.

Gerhard C. Hamm
Waialae Iki

Letters to the Editor

For Saturday, January 24, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 24, 2009

Stealing transit funds would be huge mistake

So now that we've come upon hard times, Gov. Linda Lingle and state Senate President Colleen Hanabusa want to steal the money set aside to build Honolulu's rail transit system. That says a lot about their values -- or lack thereof.

Stealing the transit tax to cover the state's revenue shortfall demonstrates their short-sightedness and tendency to do the easy rather than the right thing.

This pot of revenue has been built up over the last several years for a specific purpose -- to build a transit system that will create jobs, stimulate the economy, help the environment and improve quality of life here.

The savings plan was instituted in spite of the governor, who refused to sign the legislation, and lawmakers who balked at the creation of a new tax. Well, several years have passed now and the half-percent increase did not bankrupt anyone. Instead, the fund has built up nicely, giving us a great way to launch the rail transit project and sending a clear signal to the federal government that we're serious this time.

All that could go by the wayside if Lingle and Hanabusa get their way. They're jeopardizing federal funding, putting the project at risk, threatening the biggest economic stimulus project we've got going and thumbing their noses at the concept of saving up so we can pay for this project as we go.

And, to add insult to injury, they're getting pay raises.

John Nakagawa
Kailua

January 25, 2009

Bid to short-circuit rail tax puts jobs, funds at risk

Yes, the state is hurting for money. But proposals by the state administration and lawmakers — divert a tax for the city rail project to pay state bills — is a disastrous idea.

Anyone tracking the rollercoaster twists and turns of mass-transit planning over the decades realizes this city's record of indecision is well known in the nation's capital. How many heads must be shaking in Washington now?

A few reasons to feel exasperated with all this:

- Elected officials created the half-percent tax surcharge for O'ahu specifically to finance the rail project. At almost the precise point when work should be starting, state politicians are attempting to short-circuit this funding mechanism. Not only is this disingenuous to taxpayers, it's also terribly short-sighted.
- The people themselves voted to approve the rail project, in a referendum held last fall. That vote sent a "build the train" directive that some politicians seem to be ignoring. Gov. Linda Lingle has long advocated home rule for the counties. What happened to home rule here, governor? What happened to your publicly stated pledge to "let the people decide?"
- The argument is being made that tax money is more urgently needed for other purposes and that the transit money pipeline can be restarted later. But this overlooks the fact that any delay sends a message to Congress that could cost the state dearly in federal funds and much-needed jobs. Our entire congressional delegation is in agreement on that score.
- Equally as disturbing is the taint of politics. Among those seeking to put rail on a back burner are the governor and a top lawmaker, both of whom have been key players in the political battle over the rail and the mayoral campaign. Lingle signed the "Stop Rail Now" petition favored by opponents of Mayor Mufi Hannemann, the leading proponent of the project. Senate President Colleen Hanabusa lent her support to Hannemann's key re-election challenger, Ann Kobayashi.

And this is not likely the last time they find themselves to be political rivals, as the 2010 campaign comes into view.

Public interests must trump politics in decisions affecting one of the most important public works projects in Hawai'i's history.

The latest storm clouds threatening Honolulu's fixed-rail project blew in during the state Legislature's opening day. The state's tax director, Georgina Kawamura, outlined the bleak budgetary picture while floating ideas for raising more revenues.

These included the use of the rail tax surcharge for state purposes. In addition to the Lingle administration's idea, Hanabusa suggested a hiatus for the rail tax, presumably as a form of relief to taxpayers during difficult times.

Both plans are wrongheaded. A general excise tax holiday of a half percentage point would have too little impact on taxpayer wallets to help the economy. And redirecting the tax to the general fund, as the administration suggests, will prove costly in the long run.

Specifically, disrupting local transit financing risks a delay in federal approval for the project and holds up the federal share of the money — hundreds of millions of dollars desperately needed in Hawai'i. The construction salaries the project generates will trickle down to benefit the rest of the economy.

Delay also will endanger the investment of private money in the transit-oriented development projects envisioned around each of the train stops. That's more jobs, more tax revenue that the city and state governments need.

Hawai'i's Congressional delegation has two members well placed to shepherd the rail project through. U. S. Rep. Mazie Hirono sits on the key Subcommittee on Infrastructure and Transportation.

Even more fortuitously, U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye chairs the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, and he has repeatedly warned leaders back home against sending mixed signals.

"One of the major reasons why our transit project has received federal support, up until now, is because there is a dedicated source of local funding in place," Hirono told The Advertiser. "Any move that would jeopardize that dedicated source, I think, would raise concerns."

In this economy, there are many cities eager for federal construction funds. If the state waters down the commitment from Honolulu, why wouldn't the committee, and the Federal Transit Administration, simply hand the approval to the next city on the list?

This is the time for the Congressional delegation to speak up — loudly — against this tax diversion. The folly of the state's proposed money grab should be apparent to everyone, but it's plain that taxpayers need advocates from D.C. to defend their interests.

Otherwise, politicians who are treating this crucial public-works project like a political football are going to seize control. Honolulu has made too much hard-fought progress to let that happen.

■

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ON POLITICS

Road to better highways is paved with special funds

[By Richard Borreca](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 25, 2009

That wily legislative veteran Rep. Joe Souki is right. Souki, the House Transportation Committee chairman, and his Senate colleague, J. Kalani English, last week were hosted by Gov. Linda Lingle to unveil a \$4 billion highway construction plan.

Souki (D, Waihee-Wailuku) believes in pump-priming, spending money to make money, transportation projects from rail to roads and is not afraid to say a hike in taxes will help us at the end of the day.

So when Souki signed on to the Lingle road plan it didn't bother him that it would cost taxpayers an additional \$170 a year in higher taxes. Souki laughed and predicted that Sen. Sam Slom would not like it.

Slom (R, Diamond Head-Hawaii Kai) has fashioned an entire legislative career out of voting "No." His most forceful and gleeful negative votes go for all things related to special funds. He doesn't like putting money in special funds, he doesn't like taking money out of special funds and he doesn't like the idea that a special fund is a special place in the budget reserved for a project that cannot be touched.

"I am totally opposed to it," says Slom, who is one of just eight Republicans in the Legislature.

Slom says that many of the \$4 billion worth of highway projects are already on the books, but have not been started because the highway fund, one of those abhorred special funds, has been raided so many times that it is projected to be in deficit next year.

"The people who caused this problem are sitting in this room now," Slom says as he

gestures around the Senate floor. "They raided the fund and that is why we are short."

Back in the good old days of fiscal 2006, the highway fund was packing a \$365 million surplus, but because of planned legislative deductions, by fiscal 2010, the fund will be \$95 million in the hole.

Back in 2006, the state budget grabbed \$95 million in highway fund money and spent it on other construction projects. The state gets highway money by charging a tax on the sale of gas, by tacking fees onto your car registration and by charging tourists a fee to rent a car.

Senate President Colleen Hanabusa, who is mulling over a run for governor in 2010 and so is not as gleeful as Souki is about raising taxes, says she doesn't know if this plan will work.

"I am not sure how the public will react. It is a lot of money - \$170 per person more," Hanabusa said.

Souki, however, predicts that the voters are going to love their new roads and will think of the higher prices for gas and car registration as fair.

We will see if Souki can predict taxpayer sentiment as well as he can Slom's.

Richard Borreca writes on politics every Sunday in the Star-Bulletin.
rborreca@starbulletin.com

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Letters to the Editor

For Sunday, January 25, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 25, 2009

A billion here, a billion there

Mmmmmm, \$4 billion for rail transit, \$4 billion for more highways.

How about \$5,000 incentive checks for rail riders, \$3,000 for TheBus riders and \$1,000 for all car drivers? Oh, sorry, while we're at it, \$2,500 for Superferry users. Free medical evaluation for all residents suffering from confusion.

John L. Werrill
Honolulu

January 26, 2009

Isle highway upgrades, fee hikes deserve support

The prospect of paying about \$170 more annually in taxes to fund a massive upgrade of state highways is painful at a time of economic uncertainty.

What rescues the state's \$4 billion plan, however, is that the taxpayers won't be hit with the bill until the economy improves. Assuming the state follows through on promises to stay accountable to the taxpayers, lawmakers should give it a green light.

The state has compiled a list of 183 projects to be built over six years, work that will be financed through bonds to be repaid ultimately through a boost in the taxes and fees.

Increases are planned in:

- The gas tax, from 17 to 27 cents per gallon (taking effect in two years).
- Vehicle weight taxes, from 3/4-cent per pound for vehicles up to 4,000 pounds to 2 3/4 cents per pound.
- Annual motor vehicle registration fees, from \$25 to \$45.
- Rental vehicle surcharge tax, from \$3 to \$5 a day.

These charges are a reasonable price to pay for smoother, faster commutes and enhanced public safety.

In addition, the Lingle administration was wise to ensure that the fee increases don't add an undue burden to a crippled economy. It would take job growth of 1 percent over two consecutive quarters to trigger the increases.

The projects include heavy construction jobs such as an additional lane at the choked Middle Street merge of the H-1 and airport viaduct, and a two-lane flyover along Nimitz Highway. But the list also includes needed intersection redesigns aimed at boosting vehicular and pedestrian safety, as well as additions to the bike-lane network, all worthwhile improvements.

And there would be enabling legislation for intersection cameras that would enable better enforcement of laws against running red lights. All are aimed at curbing Hawaii's dismal record of traffic deaths, including pedestrian fatalities, improvements that are long overdue.

State Department of Transportation officials hope taxpayers also realize the investment in better roads ultimately will save time and money, with less gas wasted in traffic and vehicle wear and tear on roads in dire need of repair.

It's encouraging to see that DOT already is planning to involve the public through town meetings and an interactive Web site. A preliminary launch is targeted for the end of this week, linked off the department portal site (hawaii.gov/dot).

The finished site will enable visitors to weigh in on various projects through talk-back features. And the DOT plans to include updates on how much revenue is being generated, so the public can gauge if the financial plan is working out.

Lawmakers should see that taxpayers also are able to track which companies get the contracts. Allowing the public to follow the progress of the work provides some accountability, but the way the contracts are handled should be transparent as well.

If the state can assure that money is being spent to the benefit of public safety and a more efficient

commute, those would be enhancements worth the price.

Additional Facts

Cast your vote

Make your opinion count in our daily online poll and see the results. Today we ask:

Do you support raising taxes and fees to pay for the state's \$4 billion highway modernization plan?

Vote today at www.honoluluadvertiser.com/opinion

January 26, 2009

Letters to the Editor

Leeward coast

Farrington Highway needs to be widened

Widen Farrington Highway to six lanes from Nanakuli to H-1 and do it right away.

The existing 4 1/2-mile right-of-way is already wide enough as it exists. Carefully planned and executed, the job can be done with minimum disruption.

It will be a shovel-ready infrastructure project with economic gain much bigger than its cost. It will improve the quality of life for the entire Leeward coast. It will do the same good thing that widening Kalaniana'ole Highway did for East O'ahu. This would be a great New Year's resolution, wouldn't it?

Let's give this idea some serious thought!

Art Hansen, architect, AIA | Honolulu

January 26, 2009

Letters to the Editor

Government spending

With so many needs, is rail 'essential'?

Mayor Hannemann was quoted as saying, "We're trying to be as prudent as possible, only spending on things that are essential."

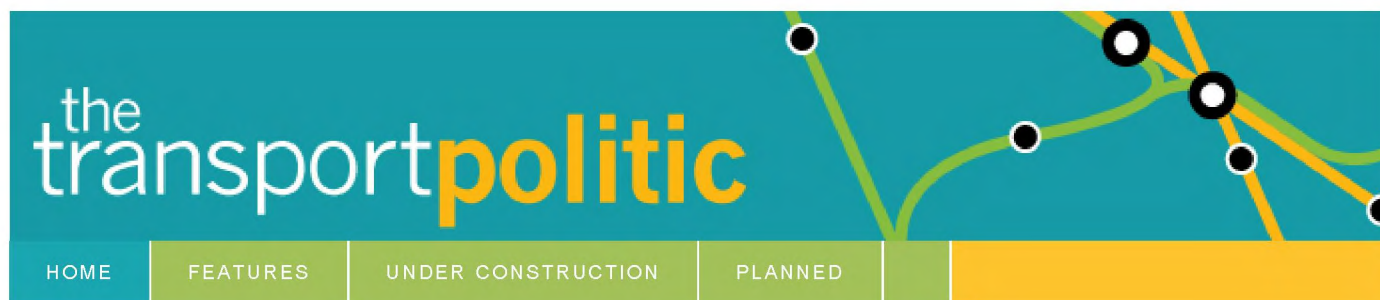
To name only a few, the Environmental Protection Agency is directing the city to fix the water waste system, our roads are atrocious, schools are in need of repair and libraries need to cut hours.

In addition, the government is cutting back on many things, including education and social services. People are losing their jobs and their homes. The Foodbank is begging for help, the Salvation Army and many other charities are asking for help.

Years ago we were told that the Convention Center was "essential," and now it sits empty much of the time.

With all of the problems we face as a nation and a state, is the rail "essential?" I wonder if the rail would have passed if Salt Lake residents had known they would be excluded from the route only days after the vote?

Pearl Daniels | Hawai'i Kai



HSR in New York Advances; Honolulu Transit Tax Under Threat

HSR Between New York, Albany, and Buffalo Gains Support From a New Senator

New New York U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D), who was appointed by Governor David Paterson after Hillary Clinton resigned to become Secretary of State, has declared her intentions to push for high-speed rail in New York State. Ms. Gillibrand **met yesterday** with Ms. Clinton, Mr. Paterson, and Senator Chuck Schumer (D) to discuss their priorities for the state, and Ms. Gillibrand excitedly told the press that all four were ready to work towards better rail in the Empire State. According to the Village Voice, she said "One area that we all agree on is that we really want high-speed rail," excellent news for New Yorkers whose Upstate congressional delegation has recently **been fighting** to push the issue to the front burner.

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (D) **told** the Niagara Gazette that high-speed rail was the top priority for that delegation, and that they have already met with congressional and federal leadership about the issue. Considering New York's large population, relative ease of connecting its major cities (they're all aligned along a single route), and economic dynamism, high-speed rail seems perfect there. Ms. Slaughter also addressed the question of what exactly she meant by "high-speed" and answered 200 mph... eventually. This is a better response than the usual 110 mph, which is hardly fast at all.

Can New York expect a **California High-Speed Rail**-type project, with 220 mph trains, on its horizon? We'll have to see, but the first question that has to be answered is where the money is going to come from.

Honolulu Transit Tax May be Used for General State Needs
















Honolulu passed a popular referendum for a 20-mile long light rail system, running the length of southern Oahu just last November, but the transit tax that would pay for the system's completion is already under threat. The *Star-Bulletin* **reports** that Hawai'i Senate President Colleen Hanabusa has proposed using transit tax revenues to shore up the already under-threat state budget. The 1/2-cent excise tax has been

About

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around since 2005. But she's been met with significant opposition from recently re-elected Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann, who has been one of Hawaii's biggest proponents of the rail mass transit system. Mr. Hannemann argues that it would make little sense to delay the rail project, considering that its construction would in itself serve as an economic stimulus. Read more about it on the [Say Yes to Honolulu Rail System Blog](#).

[Add comment](#) | [26 January 2009](#)

Fight Continues on Transit Element of Stimulus

Stimulus Fight Provokes Question: Bipartisan or Not?

The economic stimulus package which is being proposed in the House and Senate by the Obama administration has been subject to a number of criticisms [on this blog](#), notably because of its limited support for transit investments and its inclusion of large tax cuts. [President Obama](#) told a few Republicans at a White House meeting a few days ago *"I won,"* in reference to the election, and he's right: the stimulus bill should reflect his priorities in governing rather than those of the losing Republicans. And yet over a third of the \$825 billion package will go to tax cuts, which former President candidate Senator John McCain (R-AZ) argues [isn't enough](#). Several Republicans are threatening to vote against the bill unless the Bush tax cuts - remember, those for the rich - are made permanent.

There's increasing evidence that the minimal investment in transit in the stimulus bill - down from a proposed \$17 billion in Representation James Oberstar's (D-MN) [Rebuild America](#) to a measly \$10 billion today - came directly from the top, as in from Lawrence Summers, one of Mr. Obama's top economic advisers. Mr. Summers seems more like a Republican than a Democrat here, pushing for more tax cuts and fewer infrastructure projects. This is a problem, considering the enormous backlog of needed maintenance on rails, roads, and bridges (to alter the familiar turn of phrase) and the federal government's huge black hole of a budget.

The Overhead Wire has a [good post up](#) on this issue, arguing for an "office of infrastructure reconciliation," a fanciful idea. And *California High-Speed Rail Blog* describes [further opposition](#) from Representative Peter DeFazio, who has been consistent in arguing that the transit component of the bill is simply too small.

But to go a bit further, President Obama has been insistent that he wants to run the White House in a bipartisan way by "listening" to people from both sides of the aisle, and presumably "accepting" Republican ideas when "they're good." While that sounds like a noble idea, in fact it runs against the democratic process, which is supposed to let voters decide the country's direction. Voters soundly rejected Republican ideology in both 2006 and 2008, and they deserve more consideration than do upset Republican senators, who have just enough members - 41 - to filibuster Democratic legislation in the Senate. Voters want a big stimulus bill that provides jobs; Republican tax cuts don't do that, as we have seen, but infrastructure investment does. So the bill should focus on that!

Republican opposition to the bill sounds deceptive, anyway. Can we seriously expect

[Area Abandons Dumbarton Rail for Warm Springs](#)

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[March 30](#) - Opening of **Austin's** Capital MetroRail System

[April 26](#) - Opening of **Edmonton's** South LRT extension

[July 3](#) - Opening of **Seattle's** Link LRT First Phase

all 41 opposition senators to vote against a bill which will provide desperately needed aid to the American people? No. And even if they did, it's hard to imagine a scenario in which GOP senators filibuster it and prevent it from moving through, because that would simply paint the Republicans as a get-in-the-way party, rather than a party that's willing to invest in the American people. The GOP probably wants to avoid such an impression after two stunning defeats and another likely to come in 2010.

But perhaps the more significant point is that Democrats don't really *need* Republican help with large majorities in both houses, so what's with all the bipartisanship? Representative James Clyburn (D-SC) put it well in *the Washington Post*:

"I would love for it to be bipartisan, but I'll remind you that in 1993, President Clinton passed a package without a single Republican vote. It passed in the House by two votes, in the Senate by one vote, but a lot of people say it had the biggest and best growth in the economy that we have ever had and that was done without a single Republican vote.... Because it's bipartisan doesn't mean it will be successful. That's all I'm saying."

3 comments | 26 January 2009

Ray LaHood = Secretary of Transportation

Ray LaHood *became* the 16th American Secretary of Transportation today at 1:00 PM today. Exciting, eh?

P.S.: There are no longer any links on *the transport politic*'s sidebar; rather, we've moved the links to a new page, called *the transport connection*, at <http://thetransportconnection.wordpress.com>, which provides RSS feeds for each of the blogs linked. Hope this is a useful resource.

2 comments | 23 January 2009

Bombardier Presents New Catenary-Free Streetcar

MSNBC *reported today* that *Bombardier* had introduced its newest technological feat: a catenary-free, contact-less tram. The system provides a clue for the next generation of rail vehicles, and suggests a future in which trams operating in city streets all over the world will no longer have to rely on overhead catenary wires and the poles that hold them up, which can be a blot on a city's landscape.

Bombardier's system, called PRIMOVE, relies on electromagnetic fields released from buried circuits placed between and beneath the tracks. When passing overhead, streetcars convert the field to electricity used to power the train; in other words, the trains receive their power *without contact* through inductive power. This is major achievement. The charge is only activated when the



circuit is completed covered by the vehicle, which ensures that pedestrians can never come into contact with electricity.

The PRIMOVE system has the added benefit of working in conjunction with another Bombardier technology, [MITRAC](#). This system acts much like a hybrid motor in a car and recuperates power when the train brakes.

PRIMOVE will compete with technologies from rival [Alstom](#), whose [Citadis](#) product line has been one of the industry's top sellers in recent years. In Bordeaux in southwestern France, Alstom equipped part of the city's [light rail line](#) with a ground-level power supply system (called [APS](#)) through 12 km of the historic core. Along the rest of the line, the trains use less expensive catenaries for power. This system allows the train to collect power from a third rail placed between the two tracks; power is only supplied when the train is travelling directly above. Unlike Bombardier's design, though, APS is exposed to the elements - it is a visible third rail. In Bordeaux, there have been some problems with water logging, and as a result, it would be difficult to implement such a system in an area with heavy precipitation rates.

As a result, Bombardier's technology has a major advantage over Alstom's, in that it can work in all weather conditions. The fact that the power supply is buried underground ensures a higher degree of reliability and little need for future maintenance. **This is a promising technology for future trams and will eliminate a common argument made against LRT or streetcar systems: that their associated catenaries desecrate the landscape.**

Alstom has also developed a [battery-powered tram](#) for the southern French city of Nice. The trains travel through the central's city square, and in order to avoid disrupting the architectural unity of the space, the system's designers wanted to get rid of the overhead catenaries in this area. Alstom, then, equiped the trains with batteries that power them for 100 or so meters across the square. This is an interesting alternative for small distances, especially since it is probably cheaper to install, though Bombardier has yet to have its system ordered and put into active use, so we'll see.

Image above: a depiction of PRIMOVE in use, from [Bombardier](#)

3 comments | 22 January 2009

House Infrastructure Committee Hearing Considers the Stimulus Bill

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Holds Hearing on "Infrastructure Investment: Ensuring an Effective Economic Recovery Program"

At a hearing this morning, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee discussed how the stimulus bill would be used most effectively. The hearing, titled "Infrastructure Investment: Ensuring an Effective Economic Recovery Program," featured as witnesses the Governor of Wisconsin, the New York State Commissioner of Transportation, and the Chairman of the Board of the Chicago Transit Authority.

Each witness argued not only that states and municipalities would be able to distribute funds from the federal government quickly and effectively, but also that more money would provide only added benefit. Each stressed the fact that the cost of overall infrastructure needs is far more vast than the total amount of funds proposed in the stimulus bill.

From the start, members of the committee used their platform to **again criticise** the existing state of the **infrastructure bill**, which **shortchanges transit and rail** in favor of continued high levels of highway funding. Chairman James Oberstar (D-MN) was direct:



"Unfortunately, some of our proposals came victim to the tax cut, and to the Congressional Budget Office, [which is] very conservative."

Representative Sam Graves (R-MO) spoke clearly against the existing text, comparing it to Mr. Oberstar's original proposal:

"Spending on rail was reduced [in the bill]... and in fact, transportation enhancements... such as... museums... they get more money than the rail programs combined... Total state funding is less than half than... what's going to TV conversion boxes... We've really mixed the mark here... the public is going to be very disappointed here... I hope when we get to conference, we can put some of the chairman's proposals back in the bill."

But Representative Peter DeFazio (D-OR), seemed to renege on his **apparent interest** in fighting against the existing stimulus bill until it included more money for transit, saying *"It is not enough, but it is better than nothing."* Seemingly convinced that there is little he can do to alter the text of the infrastructure bill, he then said, *"We need to get this through [the bill as written] and then work on a long-term vision for 21st century infrastructure."*

In their presentations, each of the three speakers interested in rail and public transportation spoke eloquently in favor of further funding, and each argued that states, cities, and transit authorities would be able to effectively take advantage of the funds within the 90-day deadline.

Jim Doyle, Wisconsin's Democratic Governor, also speaking in favor of *States for Passenger Rail*, said the following in his statement:

"We share your view, that this recovery act should be designed to get people to work... We have been working every single day to make sure we have the projects ready to go..."

"If I might address the rail infrastructure issue... states and Wisconsin among them have long believed that passenger rail is the missing link in our national transportation policy... States have been at the center of the passenger rail renaissance... ridership on our Hiawatha service, Milwaukee to Chicago, continues to increase... this is a critical time to recognize the importance of expanding passenger rail services... we can lead the nation to a new era of passenger rail service. Intercity passenger rail service has long-term benefits." Also comes out in support of Midwest High-Speed Rail Program.

"Wisconsin has \$137 million in projects that are ready to go in 90 days. The projects will complete a substantial portion of the corridor between Milwaukee and Madison... and it will be part of the development of the Midwest rail system plan."

Mr. Oberstar responded quickly: *"Music to my ears."*

New York State's Commissioner of Transportation Astrid Glynn said the following:

"During the recent debate, we have repeatedly heard, can we meet the need, is the program sized correctly?... in essence, can we answer the new President's call to remake America... the answer from New York is an emphatic, yes!..."

"Governor Paterson has our state ready to implement the federal recovery plan... and those projects are needed, just as the jobs are... we are going to need to more than double our existing funding of transportation... you can rest assured that states... will apply federal aid to real infrastructure needs... All these programs begin with local programs for growth..."

"To get the most from the recovery, we will need a diverse package, diverse modally, and diverse across levels of government... everyone has to have a part of this process... We would suggest that a program such as this is best managed by a state entity... but the economic recovery plan needs to be flexible..."

"I hope that you will not overlook the other benefits [of the recovery program] ... we can invest more in transit and rail... New York can deliver a significant number of projects... within the timeframes being discussed in Congress, but we hope that this will not be the end of the effort, that this will be the prelude to more long-lasting efforts..."

"The projects that we are readying are large and small... we can deliver an effective economic recovery program."

Finally, Carole Brown, Chairman of the Board of the Chicago Transit Authority, made her statement:

"I need to echo my other panelists to say that we definitely could spend whatever money could come to our system in a 90-day framework. The reason I say that is because our system is so old... We have a \$6.8 billion infrastructure need to get to a state of good repair..."

"We have always looked at this package as not only a jobs bill but also an economic recovery bill... we need money to flow quickly and directly to CTA..."

"We believe a robust investment in transit is critical... I don't need to ask you what you would think the inauguration would have been like if Metro hadn't been there..."

There were some interesting questions asked by committee members.

Mr. Oberstar asked how states could play a role in developing the national rail network, and whether there were enough contractors ready to start construction. Mr. Doyle responded in the affirmative. *"There is a lot of capacity in the workforce to get people to work."* Mr. Oberstar pointed out that the Congressional Budget Office argued that states will not be able to move the money out as quickly as Congress wants, but Mr. Doyle disagreed, pointing out that the time limit is a *"challenge,"* but one that states *"must"* meet.

Representative John Mica (R-FL), ranking member, discussed his 437-day plan, which is named after the number of days it took Minneapolis to rebuild its I-35W bridge, and argued that the quicker projects are built, the cheaper they cost. Ms. Glynn pointed out that the projects being considered have already gone through their approval process and therefore would take very little time to get off the ground. Ms. Brown said *"We are always robbing Peter to pay Paul."*

In response to a question from Mr. DeFazio, Ms. Brown said *"We are ready to go... the more the better."* She repeated that she was unable to go forward with projects without funding, but if she were given the funding, she would be capable of getting started very quickly. Mr. DeFazio pointed out that operating assistance to transit agencies had been stripped from the package, and Ms. Brown responded that she has to take money from capital funds to pay for operating costs, saying *"the operating assistance was something we were very excited about."* Mr. DeFazio seemed to be in favor of using federal funds to pay transit agencies for their operating funds, arguing that no transit agencies in the world operated entirely based on fare revenue.

Representative Thomas Petri (R-WI) pointed out that transportation is a *"whole system of production,"* needing factories and more. *"To be really effective,"* he said, the funding would have to be more than a *"one-shot thing."* He expressed the common frustration of the committee that the existing stimulus bill doesn't do enough for financial needs. Mr. Doyle said he would be able to start increased train service between Milwaukee and Chicago immediately, but said that the new service between Milwaukee and Madison, and eventually to the Twin Cities, would produce *"tremendous"* long-term benefits and act as a *"down payment"* on future needs.

Representative Corrine Brown (D-FL) asked what assurances could be made to ensure the projects would be funded as Congress demanded, arguing that then Florida Governor Jeb Bush had misused post-9/11 funds. Mr. Doyle responded simply that he would follow Congress' guidance as much as possible. Ms. Brown also pointed out that the bill had reneged on the President's promise for future investment in passenger rail. Mr. Doyle said that he would not tell Congress what to do, but also said he could use as much funding as could be given, even if the stimulus size were increased substantially.

Representative Rick Larsen (D-WA) talked about the conflict over whether stimulus funds should go to the states or directly to cities and transit authorities. He asked Mr. Doyle what he thought; the Governor responded by saying that his state had a *"fair and equitable"* way of dealing with funds. Ms. Brown, on the other hand, said that she wanted the money to get to agencies as quickly as possible. She argued that state bureaucrats, especially in her Illinois, had the potential to slow down the

process and cause problems. Ms. Glynn, taking the middle ground, stated that transit funds should - and already often do - go directly to local governments, whereas highway funds make the most sense when they go to states.

Representative Daniel Lipinski (D-IL) argued that the proposed funds for transit were too small. He pointed out that Ms. Brown had said \$500 million could be spent in 90 days for the Chicago Transit Authority alone, but that the CTA would only be getting around \$250 million from the stimulus bill. Ms. Brown replied that the capital need is \$6.8 billion, and suggested that she “needed” that money from Congress, for capacity increases, renovation of tracks, and replacement of rolling stock.

Representative Mazie Hirono (D-HI) said that it would make sense to promote intermodal funding, and Mr. Doyle suggested that his state had not been effective in providing funds for different modes of transportation. He argued that his state would be able to equalize funding and provide for better connections by creating regional transit authorities later this year. Ms. Glynn used the example of the Tappen Zee Bridge to argue that New York State was ready to push forward with an intermodal project, combining transit and roads.

The hearing is to continue later in the day with other witnesses.

Image above: Chairman of House Infrastructure and Transportation Committee James Oberstar (D-MN)

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After Feel-Good Hearing, Ray LaHood Likely to be Confirmed as DOT Sec this Afternoon

Members of the Senate found a lot to like in Secretary of Transportation-designate Ray LaHood, doing little to criticize him. There was little mention of the recent revelation that he was one of the House’s [top users of earmarks](#), many of which went directly to Caterpillar, a company located in his district. Senators praised his ability to work across the aisle, arguing that he is a fair, firm, and reliable politician, and someone who gets things done. The Committee also decided to push forward his appointment as Secretary, **and he will be approved by the Committee this afternoon by 4:30 PM**, as long as there is unanimous consent, which appears very likely, considering the way the committeemembers were acting. It will then be pushed forward to a vote by the full Senate this afternoon. **Mr. LaHood, in other words, will be the Secretary of Transportation this afternoon.**

There is little surprising about the Committee’s easy response to him - he was a congressman for decades, and there are few people Senators and Representatives like more than their own colleagues.



Mr. LaHood portrayed himself as a pusher of “new ideas” in transportation during questioning (some of which is transcribed at the bottom of the post). He argued that

he would talk to as many different people as possible to get things done. He would work in a bipartisan manner, perhaps not a surprising statement coming from a Republican working in a Democratic administration. He didn't say all too much about transit or rail, but certainly didn't come across as an opponent of alternative transportation, either. He came across as reasonable, open, and not too heavily weighted towards highway funding.

He said the following in his [prepared statements](#) for the Committee:

"We must acknowledge the new reality of climate change. This has implications for all areas; investments in intercity rail and mass transit, as called for in the economic recovery and reinvestment plan, are part of the equation, but only part. Sustainability must be a principle reflected in all our infrastructure investments, from highways and transit to aviation and ports. President-Elect Obama is committed to this principle and so am I."

Obviously, it's good to know that Mr. LaHood is going to pursue investments in intercity rail and mass transit. In such a short statement, little more than this could have been expected. He also talked a bit about the reauthorization of the Transportation Bill later this year, which he hoped would allow more flexibility in transportation dollars. That is, funds would be appropriated in the manner in which communities wish, rather than in a predetermined, one-size-fits-all way. This would be a meaningful and appropriate change to the current policy, which emphasized highways over pretty much everything else.

However, there were no more specifics in his testimony, other than his repeated interest in working on a bipartisan basis. He stated that there are "no Republican or Democratic transportation issues," a point with which recent history does not agree. But perhaps the end of the Bush administration means a change in the strident anti-transit and anti-rail beliefs of Republicans?

Some of the Senators did speak about reforming the Transportation Department's decision-making based around important criteria. Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) argued that environmental considerations ought to take precedent.

Senator John Rockefeller (D-WV) said the following in his opening [testimony](#):

"Another issue I am increasingly passionate about is climate change, which cuts across all modes of transportation. I plan to further investigate the relationship between transportation and climate change in my role as Chairman, looking at what contribution our transportation system makes to climate change effects and how we should be planning to adapt our transportation network in reaction to those effects. I have been disappointed at the DOT's level of commitment to address climate change issues, in particular its failure to adequately staff and utilize the Office of Climate Change and Environment created by this Committee in 2007. Given the incoming President's leadership on this issue, I am hopeful that you will usher in a new era of proactive engagement at the DOT on the issue of climate change so that we can try to slow, and ultimately reverse, the effects of our unbridled production of carbon dioxide..."

"Additionally, after years of neglect, Congress finally passed a long-term Amtrak authorization last fall that provides strong support for our national railroad. As Secretary, I will be looking to you and the Department to fully and quickly implement this bill and to further pursue the development of high-speed rail corridors in areas where such service can help alleviate highway and aviation congestion. On the freight rail side, I'm hoping you'll help us develop ways to improve competition and service in the railroad industry while ensuring that the railroads are able to adequately invest in their infrastructure to meet growing demand."

Mr. Rockefeller's testimony points to the fact that the Senate Committee will focus on using transportation as a way to improve the environment. This would necessarily mean a focus on rail and transit systems, which are by definition more environmentally friendly than automobile-based transportation. Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC) expressed excitement about the prospect of having an intercity rail system as the Department of Transportation's next long-term project. Mr. DeMint pointed out that such a network could be effective congestion-reliever and alternative to air travel. Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) mentioned the importance of mass transit and railroads, arguing for the improved financing of Amtrak and the improved regulation of freight railroads.

There were a few interesting questions posed to Mr. LaHood.

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX): "Do you support the full national Amtrak system?"

- Mr. LaHood: *"Amtrak bill is a very good bill... I want to implement the bill effectively... the system is a lifeblood for many of the country's communities."* Mr. LaHood also argued against tolling existing roadways in response to another question from Ms. Hutchison, but argued that new bridges and the like could be tolled.

Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ): "Can we count on you to fight to get us the full amount of money we need to fund Amtrak?" "Can we count on you for these new projects, like the new rail tunnel under the Hudson river?"

- Mr. LaHood: *"I've been a strong supporter of Amtrak... You can count on me, Senator."*

Senator Klobuchar: "We talked about thinking outside-the-box when it comes to financing... Could you give me some out-of-the-box ideas for replenishing the highway trust fund?"

- Mr. LaHood: *"Public/private programs... Tolling of new lanes, tolling of highways, is a different way of thinking about it... We need to think of those kind of opportunities... Differently than just the gasoline tax... We know that people are still using Amtrak even though gas prices went down, we know people in places like Chicago are still using mass transit."*

Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO): "Earmarks... have flourished because [the Transportation Bill] is too complicated... clearly it's not a matter of bringing extra

money to a state... my state has a lot of planning... when we are earmarking a project, we are often pushing forward something that a state doesn't want... when that money could have gone to core funding." "I want to make sure the Secretary of Transportation will fight against earmarks."

- Mr. LaHood: *"We're going to do everything we can... this money can come to your state, but it has to be for projects that have been planned and have been organized. We're going to hold governors accountable, and we're going to make sure there are going to be no earmarked dollars.... but it's up to the members [of the Senate] to decide whether or not there will be earmarks!... President Obama wants to eliminate earmarks... I work for President Obama... I will work with the committee to fashion the bill... and if it doesn't have one earmark, it won't cause me any heartburn."*

Senator Mark Warner (D-VA): "I hope we will be looking at a project on a more multimodal basis... will you look at the structure of the Department?" "My hope... is that as you look at some of the projects, I would love that some of the projects be measured on new measures... such as livability." [Rather than just cost-effectiveness, as is the current norm.]



- Mr. LaHood: *"I'm going to be very hands on... I'm going to get all these modal administrators together and inform them that... we need less bureaucracy and less red tape... if it involves combining agencies, than we'll look at that."* "You have my commitment to do that Senator, and I think the reauthorization bill is going to allow us to do that."

Senator Mark Begich (D-AK): Referring to the stimulus bill: "It's going so much to the state bureaucracy that... you'll knock 15-20% off the cost of the project, just on overhead... I honestly think the system is broken just on the deliverability of the projects... if you talk to any mayor, this is a significant problem, how to delivery money in regards to highway funds."

- Mr. LaHood: *"In Los Angeles County, the voters passed a referendum to provide an enormous amount of money for infrastructure projects [Measure R, which was for mass transit]... I think that's an innovative way of thinking about the problem... as you know, President Obama wants to get this money out... we have to make sure that this money is held accountable."*

Senator Rockefeller: "You have an ability to answer questions with such a straight-ahead manner... I'm tremendously pleased about you having been our first nominee."



Image above: Ray LaHood

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LaHood Confirmation Hearing Today

Here's a friendly reminder:

Ray LaHood's [confirmation hearing](#) in the U.S. Senate's Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation will be held today at 2 PM Eastern. You'll be able to watch it at the Senate's [site](#) if you'd like to follow directly. Otherwise, expect a few reactions here starting at around 3 PM Eastern.

 [Add comment](#) |  21 January 2009

Happy Inauguration Day

the transport politic has been following transportation for the past three months, from just before the election to today, the most significant political turnover in eight years - or perhaps in twenty-eight, since 1981, when Ronald Reagan took hold of the White House.

There is little doubt that I've found many ways to criticize the incoming Obama administration, especially in recent weeks as it has become evident that the stimulus bill will not emphasize transit or rail.

But there is little doubt that the Obama administration represents a sea change from what we've come to expect from the Bush administration. The Republican tax-cut, reduce-public-services, and fight-war mentality appears to have come to its rightful end.

As a result, I can't help but be optimistic about what the next four or eight years will bring. To a new and better America!

 [Add comment](#) |  20 January 2009

New York HSR Floats Ahead

Evoking a comparison with the Erie Canal, which connected the Hudson River to Lake Erie and the St. Lawrence River and made the rampant development of New York City possible, the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* [reports](#) that New York's lawmakers are considering whether to move forward on the high-speed rail project for the state. The line has been under consideration for years, and [in 2005 was studied](#) by the State Senate under the leadership of Republican Joseph Bruno.

The Albany *Business Review* [reports](#) that U.S. House Representative [Louise Slaughter](#) (D-NY) has pushed the New York Upstate caucus in Congress - with 11 members - to advocate on behalf of high-speed rail in the state. This came after a meeting with Representative James Oberstar (D-MN), who is the chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and who has been a notable proponent of high-speed rail across the nation. He's currently [involved in a fight](#) over how to expand the amount of money for transit and rail in [the proposed stimulus bill](#). Ms. Slaughter, who represents far west New York, suggests that the line would promote economic development. This seems a worthy cause considering the problems faced by the large, formerly industrial cities in the west side of the state.

The principal route under consideration is the Empire Corridor, which extends north from New York City to Albany, before turning west and passing through Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo. Lines east from Albany to Boston, north from Albany to Montréal, and west from Buffalo to Niagara and Toronto would be the obvious future extensions. New York State has a notable advantage in that all of its major cities are along this single corridor of roughly 425 miles, almost exactly the same distance as the initial line being proposed from San Francisco to Los Angeles by the [California High-Speed Rail Authority](#). Using the same 220 mph trains as California will, New Yorkers could travel between New York City and Buffalo in 2h40, compared to 7h40 today. This would be a spectacular improvement, and even without corresponding improvements in Canadian track, it would reduce the journey time between New York and Toronto to 7h20 from 12h20 today.

But a fundamental obstacle remains: financing. New York State is running a major deficit because of the budget crisis, and there's yet to be a federal government decision to find the funds to finance high-speed rail in the U.S. Second, there's the problem of vision. The *Democrat and Chronicle* article linked above mentions 90 mph as a potential intended speed, and while that would be an improvement from today's service, it would not provide *high-speed* (more than 150 mph) service. Even the State Senate report - which promised no financing whatsoever - suggested only slight speed improvements to the line, with vague suggestions for maglev or other high-speed technologies by 2025, which might as well mean never.

In the meantime, New York's Congressional members will be working with the New York State Department of Transportation and Amtrak to evaluate how to proceed with the development of this line. If the state gets its act together, it may well be able to snatch some money away from federal pocketbook over the next several years.

But we have a problem in the United States. We're supposed to be the country that can do anything, but in terms of high-speed rail, we're constantly limited by our timidity, with an important exception in California's project. In Europe, trains moving at 90 mph are considered standard speed. But here our tracks are in such a miserable state that we have relentlessly lowered our expectations and even altered definitions in New York, in the [Midwest](#), and in the [South](#), waving away 150 mph electric trains as unrealistic fantasies and instead praising 90 mph diesel-powered trains as high-speed. *That's* the fantasy.

We've got to wake up and start pushing for what the rest of the developed world started building a long time ago.

 2 comments |  19 January 2009

Transportation Committee Responds to the Stimulus Bill

We've been discussing the flaws of the proposed [stimulus bill](#) over the past few days, notably its relative lack of funding for transit and intercity rail. On Thursday, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, led by Congressman James Oberstar (D-MN), discussed the matter. [At the meeting](#), many of the members expressed quite a bit of negative feelings about the bill. Mr. Oberstar placed some of

the blame directly on the Congressional Budget Office and the Bush Administration's Office of Management and Budget, arguing that both were dismissing potential job-making opportunities simply because they didn't feel like dealing with the needs of the new administration or working for the aid of the increasingly needy American people.

Some members even threatened **not voting for the broader stimulus bill** because of its limited proposed investments in transportation. We have our doubts about whether that would actually happen, considering the economy's present need for *any* kind of investment, but the Transportation Committee's objections to the bill - as well as those of the **broader environmental community** - give us hope that the draft of the bill we've seen in recent days is simply that: a *draft*. But these changes would have to be made in the House Appropriations Committee, not the Transportation Committee. And the Senate has yet to get its hands on this thing...

Here are a few choice quotes:

Mr. Oberstar:

*"On those issues, we will have a review in this committee... The issue, frankly, is that the Congressional Budget Office says, 'Oh, you can't - the agencies under your jurisdiction, principally federal highways, can't spend that money as fast as you proposed it, 90 days.' Now, we have a 90-day proposal, that half of that 60 - well, we started out with 85 billion dollars - be committed in 90 days, and if you don't commit it, you lose that money state, or transit agency, or FAA, and it goes back to the national pocketbook to be redistributed elsewhere. **And, Congressional Budget Office and OMB [Office of Management and Budget] said, 'Oh, that money can't be spent out that fast.' Where are they getting that information? From the current Federal Highway Administration, who's leaving town! They have no interest in giving solid information, and they're just dead wrong.** I said in our meeting of our Democratic Caucus this morning is 'The way to fix this is to fire all those damn CBO people, tell 'em, 'We'll hire you back in 6 months if you look good.' Maybe they'll understand what a job means to people in the workplace that we represent.*

"There are a million, three hundred thousand construction workers out of job now! That gentleman up there, Bud Schuster [sic?] and I have fashioned the T-21 legislation in 1998. Three million new construction jobs were created as a result of that legislation. We put funding, we put authority in the legislation to use of those highway trust fund monies to train apprentices for all of the building trades, and we did! It worked! We created real jobs, and we could do this again. States have lists, they - state transportation commissioners of the major states, in consultation with their colleagues in December in a conference call told me, 'We have these lists, we will live by them, and we will produce the jobs, we will commit them to contracts.' And, listen, we're going to have hearings every thirty days to, uh, hold all of these entities accountable under the jurisdiction of our committee. This is going to be every thirty days, they're going to report on to whom the contract was awarded, how many jobs are on the job site in the first thirty days, what the job skills are, what the payroll is on that job site, and then in the second thirty days, what is in the

supply line. We have water, and wastewater treatment, a producer of ductile plastic pipe, clay pipe, concrete pipe, We're going to have reports on all those suppliers and producers, because those are jobs too, that didn't exist, but will exist now.

*"And we have maintenance of effort required so that the states don't abandon or cities or transit agencies abandon their plans or substitute recovery funds for their regular plans. This is to create new additional jobs. **Now, if we do it this way, the accountability, transparency, and the 90-day use-it-or-lose it, we will have a million, three hundred thousand people working by the first week of June**, and that's my goal, and I know that's your goal, because I've heard from so many of you about this."*

Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-OR):

*"In the vane of what the Chair and the Ranking Member were just commenting on, I'd like to point out to members that at this point, real infrastructure investment is somewhere around 7 and 1/2 percent of this package. And I, for one as a member of this committee, **do not believe that that is adequate**. And when you look at the deficits and the deeds and I just - I'm all for getting some money committed quickly and getting people to work quickly, but we also need to be taking on some bigger projects that might take longer, as Paul Krugman pointed out, just as bad as economic times are, but again, seven and a 1/2 percent, and I would like to suggest that perhaps the committee, uh, wants to consider a letter or a resolution, to our, you know, leadership, suggesting that we need a much more substantial number on proven needs, for projects that can put people to work and make our transportation system more effective.*

*"I'm not happy with the tax cuts and many other, uh, parts of this proposal, and I **don't think I'm alone in questioning whether I will support it with that inadequate amount of money**, and that people will say, how will solve transportation problems, but with that little amount of money, no, it will only touch the very tip of the iceberg of those problems, of that deficit. So, you know, I don't know what action the committee might take or might think about taking, we are as I understand the largest committee in Congress, and **if there were a substantial number of this committee who suggest that they couldn't support a package where the infrastructure is less, way less, than 10% of the package, that might have an impact on the shaping of the package**, for whatever that's worth, Mr. Chairman."*

Mr. Oberstar:

"It's worth a lot."


Congressman Jerry Nadler (D-NY):

*"At the conclusion of the Democratic Caucus this morning, at the very end of it, objection was raised by myself and several others, to the stimulus package on the grounds similar to what Mr. DeFazio is saying, and **on the grounds that it's simply not big enough, it ought to be much bigger if it's going to***

stop the developing depression."

—

Note: Mr. Nadler is [proposing a meeting](#) later this week with President-elect Barack Obama to discuss increasing the size of the bill - presumably putting a focus on expanding the infrastructure component. To Congressional in-fighting!

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January 27, 2009

Hawaii must make difficult choices, governor warns

By *DERRICK DePLEDGE* and *PETER BOYLAN*

Advertiser Government Writers

Gov. Linda Lingle said yesterday she is optimistic about Hawaii's future but does not want to sugarcoat the severity of an economic downturn that has pushed the state's revenue forecast into the red.

"In order to maintain the public's trust and confidence, we must be open and honest about the nature and magnitude of what we are facing," the governor said in her State of the State speech at the state Capitol. "The reality is that we will have to make some unpopular choices that will reduce some services and cause others to be delivered in a different way.

"Not because we want to, but because we can't afford business as usual."

Lingle did not identify any new ideas to close the budget deficit but said state workers would have to accept some salary and benefit reductions and that tax credits, exemptions and deductions could be reduced or eliminated.

The Republican governor, in the most somber of her seven annual addresses, said it was a time of sacrifice and urged people to resist a search for blame. "This is a time of shared sacrifice when everyone must be willing to give up something," she said. "This is a time when we must rely on each other, because no one is coming to rescue us."

Lingle told reporters afterward that her administration would soon announce how it would close a \$75.6 million deficit for the fiscal year that ends in June. The governor and state lawmakers will then work together over the session to reduce a \$315.4 million deficit in fiscal year 2010 and a \$549.8 million deficit in 2011.

Yesterday afternoon, Lingle asked lawmakers to take an additional \$20 million from the state's rainy-day fund to get through this fiscal year. The governor previously had said she would ask to transfer \$40 million from the rainy-day fund, so her request now stands at \$60 million.

The additional \$20 million from the rainy-day fund, combined with \$31 million extra the state has learned it would get from federal Medicaid reimbursements, would bring the administration closer to erasing the \$75.6 million deficit this year.

Lingle said she also wants to meet with county mayors and union leaders before publicly discussing some of the budget options, particularly those that deal with collective bargaining.

deferred raises urged

Some lawmakers who have been eager for Lingle to be more specific about the budget deficit were disappointed.

"I did not hear any of those specifics. And I don't know whether it's still in the works or what," said state Senate President Colleen Hanabusa, D-21st (Nanakuli, Makaha). "But I was disappointed that we didn't have those specifics."

State House Speaker Calvin Say, D-20th (St. Louis Heights, Palolo Valley, Wilhelmina Rise), said he appreciated the governor's overtures about collaboration and is optimistic that "we'll get the job done."

Along with her request to divert more of the rainy-day fund, Lingle yesterday also recommended a bill that would help replenish the fund during times of budget surplus. Money in the fund today comes

from the state's share of a settlement with tobacco companies over the health-related costs of smoking.

In the theme of shared sacrifice, the governor backed a bill that would preserve health, retirement and other benefits for state workers if furloughs are used to close the deficit over the next few years.

Lingle, arguing that state leaders should lead by example, said the state should defer for two years the salary increases for legislators, judges and senior executive-branch officials that are scheduled for 2010 and 2011. The bill would not apply to pay raises that took effect last year and this year.

Communications, food

In her speech, Lingle highlighted previously announced plans to increase the use of alternative energy, improve highways to enhance traffic safety and reduce congestion, and embark on a "recreational renaissance" through investments in parks, trails and small-boat harbors.

The governor outlined two new proposals that are also being discussed by lawmakers: the creation of a Hawai'i Communications Commission to regulate communications services under one agency and help improve broadband access; and food self-sufficiency to promote locally grown produce and meats and help preserve agriculture.

Lingle also used her speech to further explain her reasons for appealing a state Supreme Court ruling on ceded lands to the U.S. Supreme Court. The state court has ruled that the state could not sell ceded lands until Native Hawaiian claims are resolved. The governor said the issue is not whether ceded lands should be sold, but whether the state has clear title to the land that was transferred by the federal government after statehood.

"I call upon all who cherish what is the essence of Hawai'i to come together with a willingness to understand and respect the nature of this case and it's importance to the future of our state," she said.

the transit tax

Honolulu Managing Director Kirk Caldwell said he was disappointed Lingle did not mention the city's \$5.3 billion commuter rail project as a means of traffic relief and economic stimulus. He said he also hoped Lingle would table a suggestion to divert money from the transit tax.

Last week, the Lingle administration suggested that one year's worth of proceeds from the transit tax — about \$165.3 million — could be transferred to the state's general fund to help close the budget deficit. The tax could then be extended for a year beyond a scheduled 15-year sunset to make up for the loss.

"I think most people believe it is ill-conceived, improper and illegal, and it should come off the table now," Caldwell said.

Outside the Capitol, more than 100 people turned out for a rally urging preservation of state spending on social services. Wearing lime green T-shirts and waving signs, the advocates argued for the need to maintain health, human services and housing programs during the economic downturn.

"We serve underprivileged families, abusive families and at-risk families," said Cione Gumboc, who works at Comprehensive Counseling and Support Services. "We don't want funding to be cut, or there will be more dysfunctional families."

Additional Facts

State of the State Address

State workers may face some reduction in wages and benefits. Tax credits, exemptions and deductions would likely be reduced or eliminated. Savings would address revenue shortfalls and help fund:

BROADBAND ACCESS

The state would consolidate the regulation of communications services such as wireless and cable into a new Hawai'i Communications Commission. The commission would seek to improve broadband access that could attract investors and empower residents.

FOOD SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The state would promote the use of locally grown fruits, vegetables, poultry, eggs and meat to decrease dependence on imported food and preserve agriculture. State schools, prisons and hospitals would be urged to buy local foods.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The state would launch \$240 million worth of projects over five years in a "recreational renaissance" to improve parks, trails and harbors. A highway modernization plan would include road improvements to increase safety and reduce traffic congestion.

January 27, 2009

Hawaii transit tax raked in \$300 million

Latest figures may boost calls to use the money to help balance state budget

By SEAN HAO
Advertiser Staff Writer

A tax to pay for Honolulu's planned \$5.3 billion elevated commuter train from East Kapolei to Ala Moana raised nearly \$300 million during the first two years, according to new state tax figures.

The state began collecting a half-percentage-point general excise tax surcharge for transit in January 2007. During 2008, collections rose nearly 11 percent to \$162.2 million. Despite the rise, transit tax collections overall remain below projections because of the state's slowing economy.

The newly released figures on how much has been raised via the transit tax could bolster calls from the Lingle administration and lawmakers to divert the transit fund. They have suggested using the money to ease an estimated \$315.4 million state budget deficit in the fiscal year ending June 2010. Lawmakers have suggested the transit tax, which was to expire in 2022, could be extended a year or more to make up for money siphoned off this year.

City officials argue that diverting transit taxes for other purposes could jeopardize the train project.

"That's crazy," said council member Gary Okino, who chairs the council's Transportation & Planning Committee. "It's going to totally disrupt the project (and) it might even stop the project, or at least delay it."

City officials hope to use the tax to raise nearly \$4.1 billion, on an inflation-adjusted basis, between 2007 and 2022 to pay for the 20-mile rail system. That, coupled with about \$1.2 billion in anticipated federal funds, is expected to pay the \$5.3 billion in capital costs associated with rail, according to the city's financial plan.

So far, things aren't working out as planned. From July to December collections were down nearly 6 percent to \$79.4 million. However, the city expects to net \$188 million in the current fiscal year ending June 30.

That means the city needs to collect an average of about \$18.1 million a month for the remaining six months of the fiscal year. Monthly collections have never reached that level. The average monthly take during the first six months of the fiscal year was about \$13.2 million.

If collections continue at the same pace the city could be short \$29 million in transit funds by midyear. City officials said any near-term shortfall could be offset in future years.

"I think there's enough conservativeness built into (the financial projections) ... unless we're in a deep recession for another 10 years then it may be a concern," Okino said.

Transit tax collections through the first two years totaled \$294 million.

That figure, and all figures in this story, do not include the 10 percent the state takes off the top to pay for administering the tax.

The city is still taking in much more than it is spending because construction isn't scheduled to begin in full until December.

Despite disappointing revenues, the City Council this week is expected to approve changing the train route to bypass Salt Lake in favor of an airport-area route. The change would increase the project's

estimated cost by about \$220 million. City officials have said they can ask the federal government to pay the added costs

Airport route proponents argue the route's benefits, which include potentially higher ridership, outweigh cost concerns.

However, council member Romy Cachola, who supports a Salt Lake route, said lower tax collections highlight the need to choose the Salt Lake route.

"If there's less collections, then the taxpayer will be the one to ante up and their burden will be increased," he said. "We have to look at the more cost-effective route and, to me, Salt Lake is because the airport will be another \$220 million.

"As we are getting all this bad news we really have to look at how to save money."

Additional Facts

\$300 million

Collections from 1/2-point general excise tax surcharge over two years

11%

Increase in collection last year over 2007

\$315 MILLION

State budget deficit (estimated) for fiscal year ending June 2010

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

Lingle calls for unity in battling shortfall

Legislators say they are disappointed that she did not detail cuts and funding plans

STORY SUMMARY | [READ THE FULL STORY](#)

Leaders in the Legislature and public employee unions criticized Gov. Linda Lingle as short on specifics yesterday as she presented her second-to-last State of the State address.

With the state facing a \$75 million budget shortfall this year and more next year, Lingle called for dramatic cost-cutting moves as well as stimulating economic growth.

"I was expecting to hear more specifics as to how the budget shortfall is going to be met," said Senate President Colleen Hanabusa.

"The only thing she seemed to focus on was to use this as an opportunity to suggest either wage and/or benefit cuts for public employees," said Randy Perreira, executive director of the Hawaii Government Employees Association.

— [Star-Bulletin staff](#)

.....

FULL STORY >>

[By B.J. Reyes](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 27, 2009

Democratic leaders in the Legislature say they welcome Gov. Linda Lingle's pledge to work together to get through this economic crisis, but they were hoping to hear more details of exactly what she plans to propose.

BUDGET BITS

Here are some highlights of yesterday's speech:

And city officials reacted with disappointment to Lingle saying she was open to a bill to redirect funds for Honolulu's rail-transit system to help the state make up its projected deficit.

In her State of the State address yesterday, Lingle highlighted areas that she would focus on to spur economic growth: renewable energy, agriculture, science and technology, traffic improvement and a "recreational renaissance" aimed at better utilizing state parks.

"I was expecting to hear more specifics as to how the budget shortfall is going to be met," said Senate President Colleen Hanabusa (D, Nanakuli-Makua). "We've got a huge deficit for this fiscal year we're in now that's got to have some way of being addressed, and I did not hear any of those specifics. I don't know whether it's still in the works or what, but I was disappointed that we didn't have those specifics."

» To balance the budget by taking \$60 million from the state Rainy Day Fund this year and an additional \$15 million next year. Also, take \$10 million from the Deposit Beverage Container Special Fund and \$9 million from the Wireless Enhanced 911 Special Fund for fiscal year 2010.

» To get more money, Lingle wants to tighten up tax laws, improve tax collection and administration, and reduce excessive tax credits. She says this is expected to add \$122 million for fiscal years 2010 and 2011.

» To help farmers and the agriculture industry, Lingle is calling for a 15 percent price preference for locally grown fruits, vegetables, poultry, eggs and meat that are purchased by public organizations such as schools, prisons and hospitals.

Hanabusa and House Speaker Calvin Say estimated the current-year deficit at about \$75 million.

Lingle, at a news conference in her office, said details were still being hammered out among agencies involved.

Say said some of the cost-cutting moves could be related to personnel decisions regarding state workers.

"You've got the employer on one side, you've got the union on one side and they don't want to divulge their cards," said Say (D, St. Louis Heights-Wilhelmina Rise-Palolo Valley).

Governor's Speech Stresses Reductions



Governor Lingle said state government employees will face reductions in pay and benefits and

services will be reduced to deal with a nearly two billion dollar deficit over the next two years.

[[Watch](#)]



Lingle previously had discussed the possibility of furloughs -- forcing some state workers to take a day off each week without pay to save the state money. Any such move would have to be negotiated with unions because of collective-bargaining agreements.

"Today she didn't mention furloughs, but she was talking about basically cuts in benefits," Hanabusa said, referring to passages in the speech that said everyone would have to make sacrifices.

One area likely to see little or no money is the grants-in-aid that in the past have funded nonprofit social service providers.

"Many of them are funded through GIAs, which have traditionally been whatever we have left over," Hanabusa said. "Unfortunately, it's become part of their bottom line in terms of their funding, and when we have this crisis, it is those kinds of discretionary funds that are going first."

Say said he is waiting to hear whether Lingle plans to tap into the state's Hurricane Relief Fund, which has about \$180 million in it, to help make up the current deficit.

"That particular transfer will allow us the cash flow to address this fiscal year," Say said.

Lingle's budget proposal submitted last month called for \$40 million from the state's Rainy Day Fund to help end the 2009 fiscal year with a positive fund balance. Lingle has not said whether she would use the Hurricane Fund, but has refused to tap into it in the past.

Lingle and the legislative leaders all agreed that every possible option must be up for discussion as the government tries to work through the economic troubles.

"We have always taken the position that everything is on the table and it's got to be on the table," Hanabusa said. "To understand the impact of this budget crisis that we're in -- it's not now, it's not one time, it's over the whole spectrum, it's over the financial plan and everything.

"So everything has got to be on the table."

One proposal, introduced by Hanabusa last week, is to divert tax revenue dedicated for the city's transit project for one year.

In a news conference after her address yesterday, Lingle said, "We are open to hearing what the Legislature's thoughts are. The idea came from a couple of different legislators, and their concept


was that because the city was still in the planning stages, to extend the original time of the tax for a year and use the funding from this year to help balance the budget. I thought it was an interesting proposal and one we are going to stay open to."

Kirk Caldwell, the city's managing director-designate, said, "Any messing around with the project's funding source is going to jeopardize our relationship with the federal government."

Mayor Mufi Hannemann, who did not attend Lingle's speech at the state Capitol, was also quick to reject the consideration, calling it a "harebrained idea."

Find this article at:

http://www.starbulletin.com/news/20090127_Lingle_calls_for_unity_in_battling_shortfall.html

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January 28, 2009

Shift in rail route requested

Judge cites security as reason to divert train from federal building

By SEAN HAO
Advertiser Staff Writer

Federal officials are asking the city to shift the route of the planned \$5.3 billion elevated commuter train away from the Prince Kuhio Federal Building because of security concerns.

In a letter to Honolulu City Council members this month, U.S. District Judge Helen Gillmor said the currently proposed route down Halekauwila Street exposes the nearby courthouse to a potential terrorist bombing or attack by a lone individual holding a grudge against a particular judge.

"The guideway structure will be at the same level as the windows of three judges chambers," Gillmor wrote.

Gillmor said she is also concerned that terrorists could do something similar to the 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City and the 2004 commuter train bombings in Madrid, Spain.

"We are still at war with terrorists who want to destroy us — and will be for years to come," Gillmor wrote. "Federal buildings have been prime targets.

"The proposed rail transit system on Halekauwila Street would expose the Federal Courthouse to a much greater risk, similar to the train bombings which occurred in Madrid."

The Madrid bombing killed nearly 200 people, while the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City claimed 168 lives.

U.S. District Marshall Mark Hanohano also signed the letter.

In the letter, Gillmor recommends the city shift the train's route to Queen Street, King Street, Beretania Street or others. She also notes that she has met with the city officials and written to the Federal Transit Administration asking for a route change. The FTA is expected to provide \$1.2 billion to help fund the project.

According to the letter, city officials have told Gillmor that any change in route must be made by the City Council.

The council is scheduled to meet today to discuss changing the route to bypass Salt Lake in favor of the airport area. A change in the route to Queen Street is not expected to be as major a change in the route. Additionally, construction is not expected to reach the Downtown area for several years, giving officials time to resolve the issue.

Mayor Mufi Hannemann hopes to start construction on the East Kapolei-to-Ala Moana train in December.

Council member Charles Djou yesterday said he will introduce a resolution recommending the change.

"I'm going to introduce a resolution asking for a shift, but the purpose of introducing that resolution will be to open up discussion on this and see does this make sense," he said. "It doesn't sound like a big deal, but we'll see."

HONOLULU WEEKLY

LETTERS

Honolulu Weekly

Jan 28, 2009

I was quite disappointed in the story about rail in the Weekly issue recapping the top stories of 2008 ("The Late (Great?) 2008," 12/31), and its weak stance on rail in general.

Rail will help our island become more sustainable. It has proved to use less energy for transportation than cars and trucks, reduce greenhouse gases and take cars off the road in cities. Rail will give us locals another option to travel on the congested, overcrowded roads between town and the west side. Rail has been endorsed by a wide array of groups, from business leaders like the Chamber of Commerce of Hawai'i and the Hawai'i Business Roundtable, social justice groups like AARP Hawai'i and many neighborhood boards.

Even the local Sierra Club put aside its differences with the mayor and recommended a fixed guideway. Yet strangely, *Honolulu Weekly*, a progressive news outlet that publishes a sustainability issue each year, has not taken a strong stance advocating rail. Yes, the City Council politics around rail are somewhat ridiculous, with the flip-flopping of Charles Djou from vehemently anti-rail to tepidly pro-rail and Romy Cachola crying when his backroom deal on the route fell apart. But the antics of the Council do not change the facts: rail is far more sustainable than cars and trucks. As our island's population grows, we will need a strong push for sustainability, including rail. I hope the *Weekly* will be a constructive and positive force in the conversation.

Mike Chang

Honolulu



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Cachola Loses; Rail Going To Airport

By Andrew Pereira

Story Updated: Jan 28, 2009 at 9:27 PM HST

STORY SUMMARY>>>

For over an hour Honolulu City Councilman Romy Cachola tried to convince his colleagues that a route through Salt Lake Boulevard for Oahu's elevated train system made much more fiscal sense.

Ultimately the Council rejected Cachola's arguments, voting 6-2 to send the mass transit system past Honolulu International Airport.

The route switch will cost an additional \$226 million, according to the city's Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Cachola hung his hopes on the sour state of the economy in order to keep the route through the main hub of his district.

"The more money that we are adding to the alignment will translate into an increased burden on the part of our taxpayers," said the councilman. An amendment introduced by Cachola requiring the Council to pick the most cost effective route was eventually voted down.

In testimony Wayne Yoshioka, the director of the city's Department of Transportation Services, said the airport route would be more conducive to transit oriented development and according to the DEIS, result in 8,000 more boardings per day.

"The number of boardings for the Salt Lake alternative is 87,570 per day," said Yoshioka. "The airport's is 95,310 boardings per day; approximately close to an eight thousand difference."

Yoshioka said the city would now look at its options for coming up with the additional funds needed to build the airport route, which includes four rail stations compared to only two for the Salt Lake alternative. One of the options being considered is petitioning the Federal Transit Administration for more money.

"Now we know that the Council has decided to do that shift, we'll look at the appropriate way to try to address that," said Yoshioka. So far the city's half percent transit tax has raised \$331 million, with ten percent going to the state to cover administrative costs.

The only councilmember who supported Cachola was Duke Bainum, who replaced failed Honolulu mayoral candidate Ann Kobayashi.

"The people voted back in November for a route assuming that Salt Lake was on the route and that turned out not to be the case," said Bainum. "If this (resolution) passes today... somehow that just doesn't seem fair."

Cachola added to Bainum's comments, saying Salt Lake residents had been promised a widening project for Salt

Lake Boulevard in conjunction with the elevated rail line.

"We promised them \$30 million for a road widening (and) nothing happened. They voted in support of rail believing the alignment goes to Salt Lake."

Changing the rail line's route toward the airport was a major victory for Councilmen Todd Apo and Charles Djou, who sponsored the measure.

"If Honolulu does rail," said Djou, "we must do it right. Switching the rail route from Salt Lake Boulevard to the airport and Pearl Harbor is the first of several steps needed to correct numerous problems with the proposed Honolulu rail system."

The DEIS estimates the total cost of the rail project in 2008 dollars, including the airport segment, at \$4.5 billion.

During Wednesday's hearing the Council did not address another proposed route change suggested by U.S. District Judge Helen Gillmor. In a letter to council members, Gillmor wrote that the current route through Halekauwila Street next to the Prince Kuhio Federal Building should be moved due to security concerns.

The judge said the elevated rail line would be on the same level as the chambers for three judges, which could be targeted by terrorists.


Yoshioka said a transit security committee is reviewing all of the safety concerns along the proposed 20-mile route, but that changing the fixed guideway away from Halekauwila Street would likely not be required.

"We're taking this very seriously; we're taking a very close look at it," said Yoshioka. "Right now we believe most of the concerns can be addressed without having to move the route."

Andrew may be reached at apereira@khon2.com or ph. 591-4263.

Find this article at:

<http://www.khon2.com/news/local/38580482.html>

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Letters to the Editor

For Wednesday, January 28, 2009

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 28, 2009

Why does our rail cost more than Phoenix's?

Now let me see if I have this right -- Phoenix built a light rail system, the same length as the one from Kapolei would be, at a cost of less than \$1.5 billion. Mayor Mufi Hannemann wants to ramrod his system to be built by Parsons Brinckerhoff at a cost of \$5.3 billion and counting. Does this sound to you, especially those on the City Council, like the mayor is looking out for the people of Oahu? Think about it. This will affect you for many years to come.

Robert Kruse
Honolulu

January 29, 2009

Council changes transit route to serve airport

Abandoning Salt Lake rail line will add \$220 million to cost

By Sean Hao

Advertiser Staff Writer

Honolulu's planned \$5.3 billion elevated commuter train is now planned to connect to Honolulu International Airport, under a resolution passed by the City Council yesterday.

The resolution changes the route that previously went through the Salt Lake community. The change adds about \$220 million to the cost of the project but is expected to generate higher ridership and greater community acceptance.

Much of the debate at yesterday's meeting focused on which route Honolulu's planned 20-mile train will take from the Aloha Stadium area to Middle Street. The former Salt Lake route was the product of a political compromise to win the swing vote of Councilman Romy Cachola, whose district includes the area. However, following November's narrow victory for the rail ballot issue, Councilman Charles Djou said he would support an airport route.

After the 6-2 vote, Cachola credited Djou for providing rail opponents with ammunition to sue the city or to launch another petition to put rail on the ballot. Incoming Councilman Duke Bainum, who voted against the change, also expressed concern that the council shouldn't change a route that was approved by voters.

"We did not abide by the vote," Cachola said. "People voted believing it would go through Salt Lake."

"(Djou) may have given the tools to the opposition, and I hope it will not happen," Cachola added.

Djou, who opposes the train project on cost grounds, maintains the airport route makes more sense. He denied that his support for the change was part of a plan to kill the project.

"That's not my grand scheme here, but I'm not going to be crying any tears if that happens," he said.

Yesterday's change in the route may not be the last. This month, a federal judge and U.S. marshal asked the council to divert the train's route from Halekauwila Street because of concerns that route would expose the nearby Prince Kuhio Federal Building to a potential terrorist bombing or attack by a lone individual holding a grudge.


Wayne Yoshioka, director of the city Department of Transportation Services, said the city is evaluating ways to accommodate security concerns without altering the train's route.

"We're still in the middle of this evaluation, but I think we want to try that first before we talk about moving the route," he said. "We're taking their concern very seriously and we will fully evaluate this."

However, Yoshioka said automobiles, which are allowed down Halekauwila Street, already pose a bombing risk. In addition, he said, nearby buildings would likely provide a better platform for sniper fire than would a moving train.

In other train-related business yesterday, the council passed a bill that fixes a glitch in the law that's preventing the city from soliciting bids to build the train, which is to connect East Kapolei to Ala Moana. Legally, the city has been advised not to solicit bids for any construction contracts until changes are made to the original ordinance authorizing the city to build the train.

The city plans to solicit bids for about \$1 billion in contracts this year as part of an ambitious plan to start construction of an elevated commuter train in December. The city plans to launch limited train service in phases starting in late 2013 and ending in late 2018.

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New rail route OK'd

Salt Lake residents feel betrayed by the diversion to the airport

[By Laurie Au](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 29, 2009

The City Council approved a bill yesterday that diverts the intended route of the city's \$4 billion rail-transit system to the airport, angering residents who wanted the line to go through Salt Lake.

Honolulu Council Switches Transit Route



The city had planned for the planned transit system to change from Salt Lake to the Airport.

[[Watch](#)]



In a 6-2 vote, the City Council passed legislation that alters the 20-mile transit route to go to the airport and Pearl Harbor Naval Base instead of the Salt Lake residential area. The rest of the route for the elevated system, from Kapolei to Ala Moana, will stay the same.

The approval came as no surprise since the City Council resurrected the debate over the rail route in November, when a majority of Oahu voters voted in favor of the system.

"It makes sense," said Councilman Gary Okino, who voted in favor of the airport route. "The airport route is clearly superior."

The airport route will generate higher ridership, according to a detailed report by city consultants, but will cost about \$220 million more for construction since it is about three-fourths of a mile longer.

"Our economy is worsening," said Councilman Romy Cachola, who represents the Salt Lake area and who voted against the change. "It will translate into an increased burden on our taxpayers. During these economic times, we have to be more sensitive."

Mayor Mufi Hannemann, who has long preferred the airport route, has distanced himself from this renewed debate, stating publicly that this is a City Council decision.

"The decision is the Council's decision," Wayne Yoshioka, the city transportation director-designate, said yesterday. "We would always respect whatever decision they made in regard to the alignment."

Councilmembers Charles Djou and Todd Apo introduced the idea of changing the rail alignment after the November election, causing an uproar among Salt Lake residents.

Salt Lake resident Tom Strout took off from work to aggressively lobby the City Council in 2007 when it selected the Salt Lake route. Strout also campaigned hard in Salt Lake for residents to vote "yes" on a ballot question in November to approve the project.

"I wish they (the City Council) would have left it alone and done what they planned the first time," Strout said this week. "That way, my taking vacation for the community wouldn't have been in vain."


"When it's increasingly uncertain whether we can pay for the Salt Lake route, opting for the more expensive route, in my view, is reckless," said Salt Lake resident Mark Taylor.

Cachola, who was the deciding vote in 2006 to create the mass transit system, claims the mayor promised Salt Lake residents in a closed-door meeting that there would be a transit stop in their community.

Councilman Duke Bainum also opposed the airport route because of its cost.

"I think the airport route would be a whole lot better if the route continued into Waikiki," Bainum said. "It is my sincere hope that Salt Lake, with its dense population, will get a spur sooner or later."



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OUR OPINION

Nimitz flyover might help traffic flow

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 30, 2009

Gov. Linda Lingle has proposed rush-hour "flyover" lanes above Nimitz Highway as part of her multibillion-dollar modernization of highways. The state should go forward with completion of a structure that has long been a part of the city-state transportation plan.

Opponents of the rail system between Kapolei and Ala Moana proposed the High Occupancy Toll lane system as an alternative to rail, citing what they claimed to be the success of such a viaduct in Tampa, Fla. They maintained that a HOT lane system alone would relieve traffic congestion at a fraction of the cost of a rail system.


Toru Hamayasu, the chief planner in the city's Department of Transportation Services, explained that HOT lanes by themselves would create their own congestion in downtown streets, because all of the estimated 20,000 users would exit downtown.

Hamayasu said proponents of the HOT lanes were unable to explain what would happen to cars after exiting the viaduct, where the backup would occur. Billions of dollars would be needed to widen streets in the downtown area to relieve congestion caused by the new stream of traffic, he said.

Hamayasu predicts that the rail line and the 2.2-mile flyover system, without tolls, between the H-1 freeway near Honolulu Airport and Iwilei will complement each other. The two-lane Nimitz flyover is to be one-way into town during the morning and away from town in the afternoon, eventually in tandem with the rail system. The flyover will not eliminate the inbound morning traffic queue but will move it closer to the downtown destination, he said.

Find this article at:

http://www.starbulletin.com/editorials/20090130_Nimitz_flyover_might_help_traffic_flow.html

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Home

Military community invited to comment on proposed Honolulu Rail Transit Project

Story by

Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project

Submitted on Fri, 01/30/2009

All armed services personnel are invited to submit comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for the proposed Honolulu rail transit system. Comments may be submitted until Feb. 6.

The Draft EIS evaluates three Build Alternatives for an elevated rail transit system from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center and a No Build Alternative. The Build Alternatives follow identical routes, except by Aloha Stadium, where the:

- Salt Lake alternative continues along Salt Lake Boulevard to Ala Moana.
- Airport alternative routes along Kamehameha Highway with one rail station near the entrance to Ford Island and the Arizona Memorial Visitors Center, and a second station serving the Nimitz and Makalapa Gates of Naval Station Pearl Harbor, as well as the main entrance to Hickam Air Force Base, then continuing onto Nimitz Highway, past Honolulu International Airport and onward toward Ala Moana.

A third Build Alternative includes both the Salt Lake and airport routes.

The Draft EIS, complete with detailed maps of all Build Alternatives, can be downloaded at the project's Web site (www.honolulutrainsit.org). The Web site also has a video guide to the Draft EIS with key facts, computer-animated fly-throughs of the Salt Lake and airport alternatives and concept renderings of the proposed rail stations, including the rail station in front of Naval Station Pearl Harbor.

The public can comment in writing to the Department of Transportation Services (650 South King St., 3rd Floor, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813) or online at www.honolulutrainsit.org.

In addition to the project's Web site, copies of the Draft EIS are available for review at state libraries, the city library, the Department of Transportation Services (DTS) office (650 South King St. – 3rd Floor), and the DTS – Rapid Transit Division office (1099 Alakea St. – Suite 1700).

The public comment period is mandated by federal and state laws. All comments received will be considered as the Final EIS is prepared by the Federal Transit Administration and the city. All relevant comments will be responded to in writing.

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January 31, 2009

No room for Mufi's large ego

By David Shapiro

President Obama kept things pretty much drama-free, as promised, but Gov. Linda Lingle and the Legislature picked up the slack for our "fIASHback" on the week's news that amused and confused:

- Obama scolded Washington to toughen up like Chicago after his daughters' school was closed because of an ice storm. I wonder what Mr. Windy City thought about his birth state shutting schools for a stiff breeze that never came.
- Mayor Mufi Hannemann was a no-show for Lingle's State of the State address. He sent his regrets when they wouldn't provide an extra seat for his ego.
- Reporters grumbled they had to pay for cell phone text messages from Lingle's staff alerting them to the highlights of her speech. It couldn't have cost much if they just sent the applause lines.
- The governor and legislators plan to restrict the controversial high-technology tax credit. It'll be limited to rich people who can't find any other ways to avoid paying taxes.
- Lawmakers complained about Lingle's use of the state's rainy-day fund to balance the 2009 budget. To them, it isn't raining until they have to give up their 36 percent pay raises.
- Former Rep. Jim Shon said the fundamental issue facing Lingle and the Legislature is, "How do we absorb the pain as painlessly as possible?" Not by using the brain as brainlessly as possible.
- Reacting to "Bodies ... The Exhibition," state legislators want to outlaw the public posing of cadavers. Some people just can't take a little competition.
- Police say there's no way to enforce the City Council's ban on sending text messages while driving. I don't know about that. Since the drivers have their phones out, cops can just text the citation: U R BUSTED!
- The council switched the O'ahu transit route to run trains past the airport instead of through Salt Lake. Good thinking. If tourists ever come back, they'll be able to get a ride halfway to Waikiki.
- Joe Daniels of the local hip-hop group B.E.T. wept when he was sentenced to be locked up for 14 years in one of Hawai'i's biggest meth distribution cases. That'd be a catchy name for a prison band: Blubbering. Every. Time.

And the quote of the week ... from Rep. Gene Ward about news coverage of the economy: "If people lived by the headlines, they'd say we're going to hell in a handbasket. ... You guys who buy the ink by the barrel are really doom and gloom." Is he kidding? In this economy, I can barely afford to buy ink by the cup.

David Shapiro, a veteran Hawai'i journalist, can be reached by e-mail at dave@volcanicash.net. His columns are archived at www.volcanicash.net. Read his daily blog, Volcanic Ash, at www.honoluluadvertiser.com/blogs.

HONOLULU RAIL TRANSIT

We Want Your Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Honolulu Rail Transit!

Honolulu Rail Transit is an elevated rail line that will connect West O'ahu with downtown Honolulu and Ala Moana Center. It will:

- improve public transportation
- reduce future traffic congestion
- produce more reliable travel times
- support sustainable growth as O'ahu's population increases

You can comment on the Draft EIS.

On November 21, 2008 the City and County of Honolulu and the Federal Transit Administration

will begin accepting comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for Honolulu Rail Transit. The Draft EIS examines the impacts, benefits and costs of three proposed routes for the rail line. Public comments will be accepted until February 6, 2009.

Where can I get a copy of the Draft EIS?

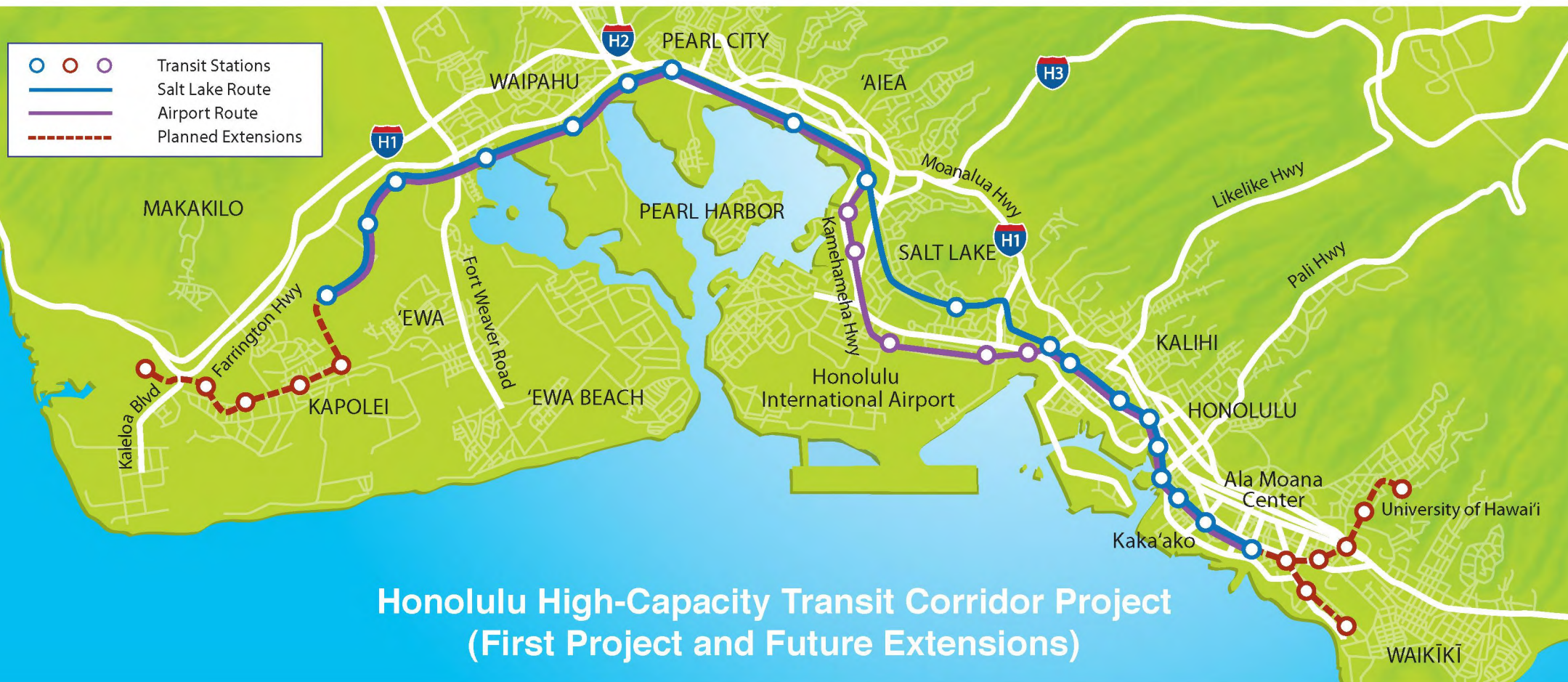
The Draft EIS is available at all state libraries; the City library; all universities; and the Department of Transportation Services (650 South King Street, 3rd floor); and at www.honolulutransit.org. You

can order a free electronic version on DVD or order a printed copy for a fee. Call **566-2299** or visit www.honolulutransit.org to order. Leave your full name, address and phone number.

How can I comment?

You have a choice:

1. In writing mailed to:
**Mr. Wayne Yoshioka, DTS,
650 S. King Street, 3rd Floor,
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813**
2. Online at www.honolulutransit.org





Honolulu On The Move

NEWSLETTER OF THE HONOLULU HIGH-CAPACITY TRANSIT CORRIDOR PROJECT



Welcome to our new "I love rail" feature, in which we spotlight energetic supporters of a new elevated rail system for Honolulu.

This month, we look at the nonprofit group AARP-Hawai'i, which promotes independence, choice and control for people as they age. "We believe the rail project offers the potential for expanded mobility options, more affordable housing and improved access to public facilities such as schools, hospitals and recreational areas that support a healthy lifestyle," according to Barbara Kim Stanton, AARP Hawai'i State Director.



Expanded mobility options, whether by train, TheBus or TheBoat, will make it easier to travel around our island and benefit everyone, particularly our aging population. In the next 22 years, the number of Hawai'i residents aged 65 or older will increase by 86%.

More mobility is a key component to our quality of life; it saves time that would otherwise be wasted sitting in traffic. Rail will reduce traffic delays on our roads in the future by at least 20 percent between Kapolei and UH Mānoa. Islandwide, rail will take more than 30,000 cars and trucks off the roads daily.

AARP-Hawai'i also supports rail because of the potential for Transit Oriented Development (TOD), which encourages new housing, government services and business opportunities around rail stations. With TOD, community members can live close to services such as pharmacies, supermarkets, and adult care centers.

Rail Will Fight Recession

Aloha! UH-West O'ahu

economics professor Lawrence Boyd investigates the impact that building Honolulu's proposed rail transit system will have on the state's economy in the February issue of *Hawaii Business* magazine. His independent analysis puts the project's combined economic stimulus at more than \$3 billion over the next three years, and it could help our stalled local economy recover in 2010.

As published in *Hawaii Business*, professor Boyd's analysis shows that building the airport route will have a direct impact on the economy of \$160 million this year and rising dramatically: \$600 million for 2010 and over \$1 billion in 2011.

Similar economic benefits are in the project's Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which forecasts that construction activity will generate more than 10,000 jobs a year on average. This will bring paychecks to individuals and families for rents, mortgages and healthcare, buying essentials like food, clothes and school supplies, and spending for travel and entertainment.

Known as an induced impact, this household spending will strengthen our state's finances. By combining the direct, indirect and induced economic impacts, the professor's data predicts the project's contribution by year:



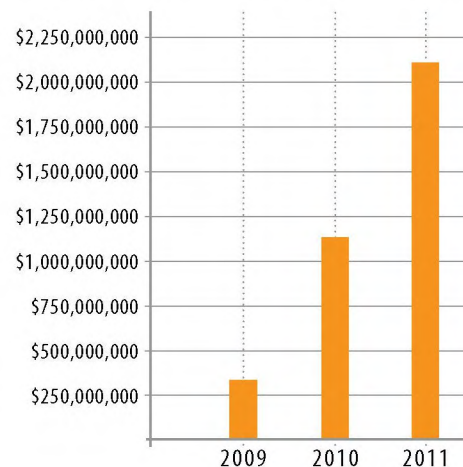
Nationally, rail transit construction is creating new jobs and new revenue.

- 2009 – \$307.2 million
- 2010 – \$1.2 billion
- 2011 – \$2.1 billion

He estimates that building the airport route can help ease the recession this year and could grow our economy by 3 percent in 2010.

To read more, look for the special construction section in *Hawaii Business*.

Direct, Indirect, and Induced Impact on Hawai'i



Source: *Hawaii Business* magazine

FEBRUARY 2009



Honolulu On The Move

Contact Us

You can reach us by calling the project hotline at 566-2299 or by submitting your comments to www.honolulutransit.org.

Call or email us if you would like to receive an electronic version of this newsletter or would like be removed from our mailing list.

City Council Picks New Route



After convening several public meetings and hearing testimony from residents, on January 28 the Honolulu City Council passed a resolution to change the first 20 miles of the proposed rail route from the Salt Lake route to the Honolulu International Airport route.

In choosing the airport route, the City Council's resolution cited the higher projected daily ridership compared to the Salt Lake route and the convenience for visitors, residents and the military community. More than 7,000 residents work at the airport, and the airport serves 58,000 daily arrivals – a

figure projected to double in the next 20 years.

According to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, key potential impacts of the Airport route include:

- 23% reduction in future traffic delay.
- Construction cost of \$4.5 billion in current dollars.
- Annual maintenance cost of \$68 million.
- 22 elevated rail stations. In addition to a station at Honolulu International Airport, stations would be located at the Makalapa Gate of the Pearl Harbor naval station and Lagoon Drive.

To learn more about the airport route, visit the project's website www.honolulutransit.org, where you will find detailed maps, a computer-animated tour of the route as well as conceptual renderings of the proposed rail stations.

Saving Money With Public Transportation

Times are tough and people are looking to trim expenses from their household budgets. In Honolulu, our public transportation system can save families up to \$831 a month and nearly \$10,000 a year, according to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

By eliminating a household vehicle and buying a monthly bus pass, individuals and families can save money on car loans, gas, maintenance and parking – funds that can be used for home expenses, meals, school and other essentials.

When Honolulu's rail system begins service, it will provide more public transportation options to residents and more opportunities to save transportation costs. And whether you ride a train, TheBus or TheBoat, the cost of a ticket will be the same, enabling you to easily use O'ahu's improved public transportation to get to work, school or run errands.

To calculate how much public transportation can save you and your family, visit www.publictransportation.org.

Honolulu Rail Transit Project

Honolulu On The Move 

566-2299 | www.honolulutransit.org

HONOLULU RAIL TRANSIT

The project is a 20-mile elevated rail line that will connect West O'ahu with downtown Honolulu and Ala Moana. The system features electric, steel-wheel trains capable of carrying more than 300 passengers each.

Trains can carry more than 6,000 passengers per hour. New bus routes will provide direct connections to the stations.



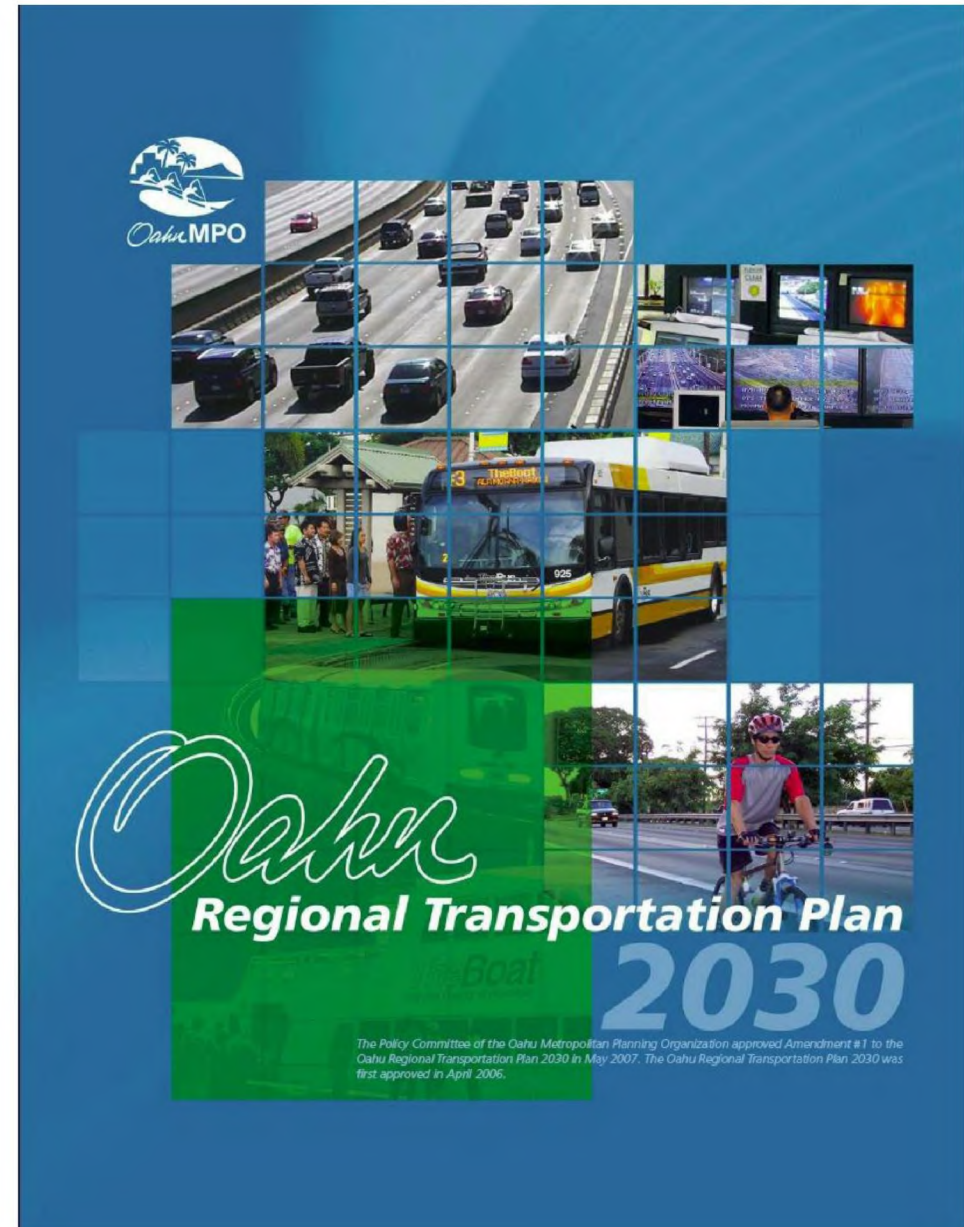
Planning for the Future

O'ahu in 2030

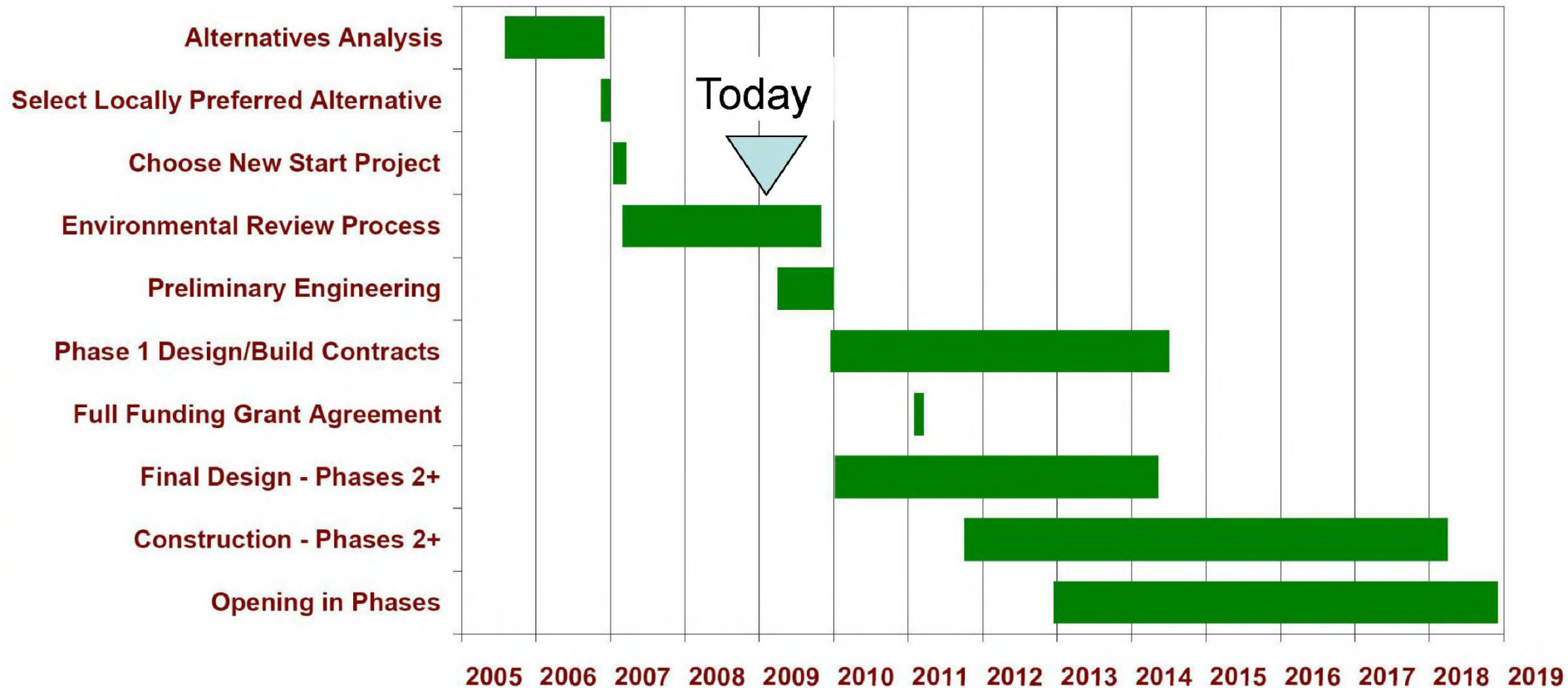
- 200,000 more residents than in 2005
- 100,000 more jobs than in 2005
- 750,000 more daily trips than in 2005

Multi-Modal Options to Improve Mobility

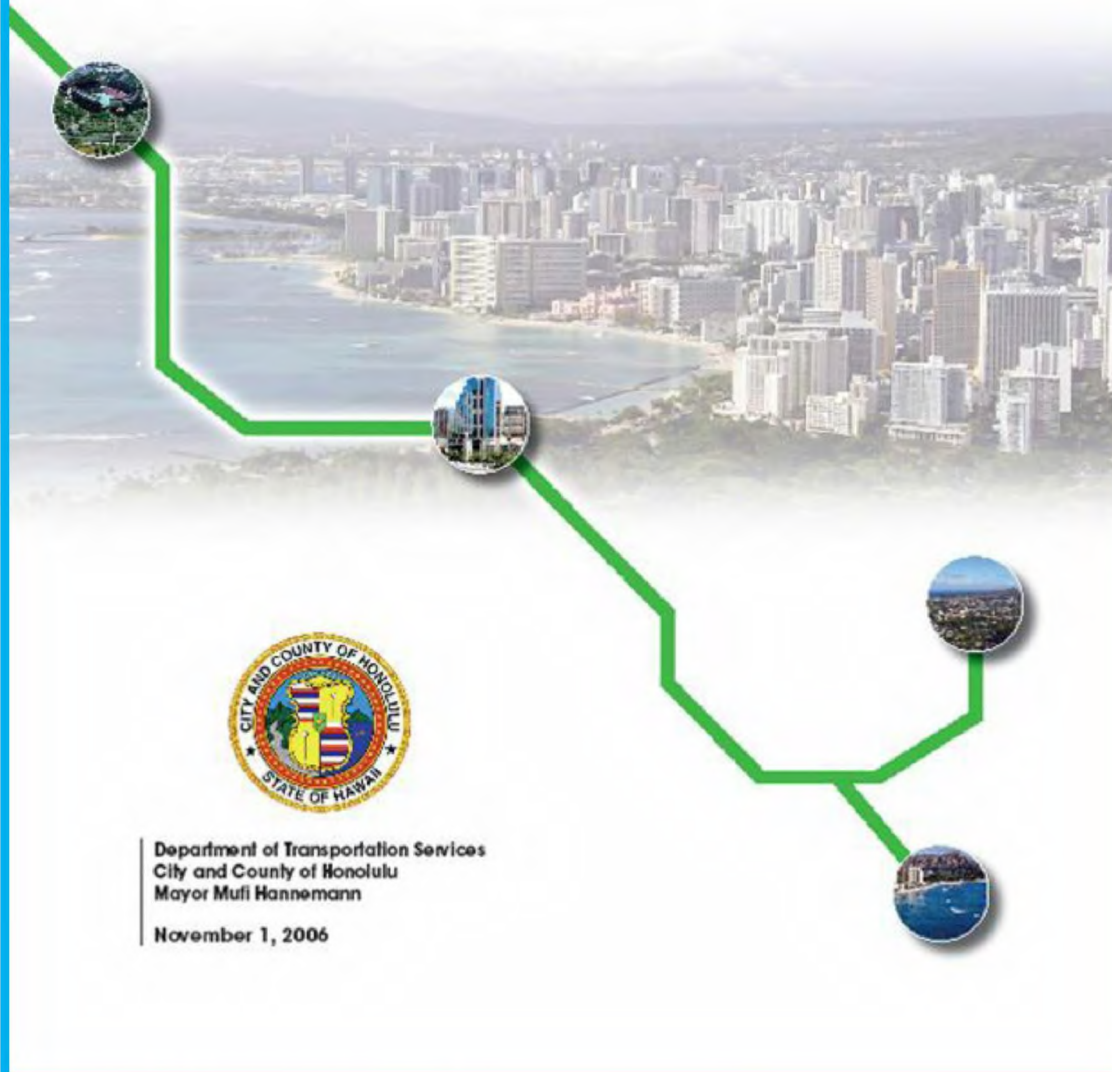
- Highway Expansion
- Traffic Engineering Improvements
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Projects
- TheBoat
- Expansion of TheBus
- Fixed Guideway Project



Project Schedule



Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project Alternatives Analysis Report



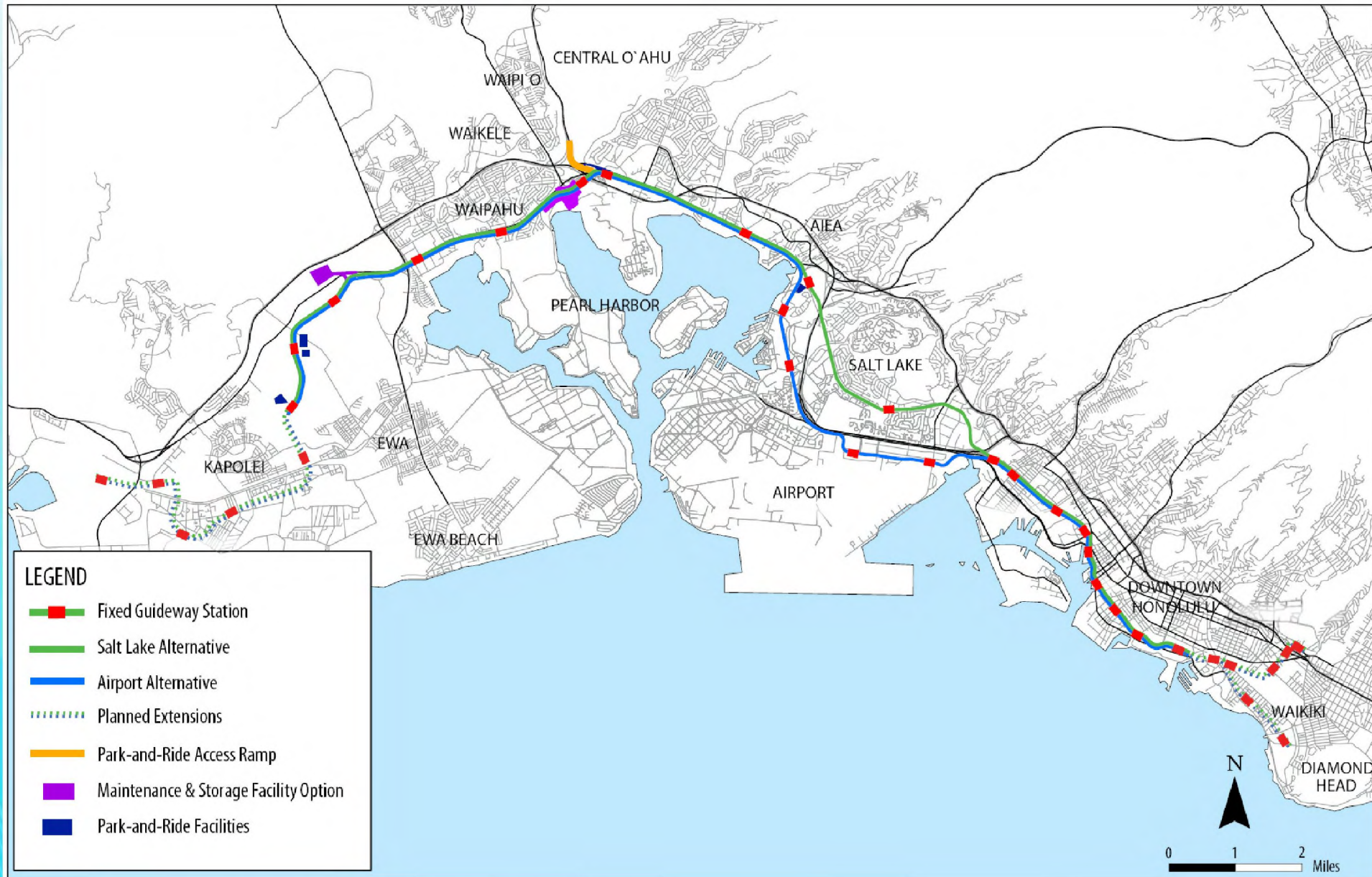
City Council Selection

December 22, 2006

- By a vote of 7 to 2 the City Council selected Fixed Guideway

COUNCIL	12/22/06	CR-508 ADOPTED. BILL 79, CD2, FURTHER AMENDED ON THE COUNCIL FLOOR TO CD2, FD1, HOWEVER, BILL 79, CD2, FD1, FURTHER AMENDED TO BILL 79, CD2, FD2 (FINAL #2), AND SUBSEQUENTLY PASSED THIRD READING, AS AMENDED (BILL 79, CD2, FD2 (FINAL #2)) (NOTE: <u>BILL 79 (2006)</u> , PROPOSED CD2, FD1 (NORTH-SOUTH BRANCH, NON-LPA COMMITMENT) WAS ALSO CONSIDERED AND SUBSEQUENTLY WITHDRAWN)					
	APO Y	CACHOLA Y	DELA CRUZ Y	DJOU N	GARCIA Y		
	KOBAYASHI Y	MARSHALL N	OKINO Y	TAM Y			

AA Alignment Selection



EIS Topics

- Chapter 1 Background, Purpose and Need
- Chapter 2 Alternatives Considered
- Chapter 3 Transportation
- Chapter 4 Environmental Analysis,
Consequences, and Mitigation
- Chapter 5 Section 4(f) Evaluation
- Chapter 6 Cost and Financial Analysis
- Chapter 7 Evaluation of Alternatives
- Chapter 8 Comments and Coordination

Environmental Impact Statement

- **Draft EIS Comment Review Period**
Nov. 24 – Feb. 6
- **Comments Addressed in Final EIS**
Late Summer 2009
- **Record of Decision**
Fall 2009



What could it look like?



Honolulu On The Move 

566-2299 | www.honolulutransit.org

AR00082795

What could it look like?



Kamehameha Highway at Ka'ahumanu Street



Kamehameha Highway near Radford Drive



Crossing Nuʻuanu Stream



Halekauwila Street at Mother Waldron Park



How would I use it?

- 1. Walk or take bus to
Waipahu Transit Center
Station** **10 – 15 mins**
- 2. Take escalator or stairs up to
station platform** **2 mins**
- 3. Wait for train** **2 mins**
- 4. Board train and ride to Civic
Center Station** **15 mins**
- 5. Take escalator to ground and
walk to work** **5 mins**

**Total Trip from home in
Waipahu to Civic Center** **34 – 39 minutes**

How much will it cost to build?

	Millions of 2008 Dollars
Estimated Construction Cost	2,100
Design / Construction Contingency	555
Construction Subtotal	2,655
Right-of-Way	150
Vehicles	295
Professional Services	795
Project Reserve	230
Capital Cost	4,125
Finance Charges	380
TOTAL COST	4,500

Sources and Uses of Funds

	Millions of Inflated \$
GET Surcharge Revenues	4,050
FTA New Starts Funds	1,385
TOTAL REVENUE	5,435
Capital Cost	4,930
Finance Charges	505
TOTAL COST	5,435

Operating & Maintenance Cost

- Rail operating & maintenance cost, after fares, will be ~\$45 million a year
- 2-3% of the City's annual operating budget, an amount that could be accommodated without an increase in taxes

A bus+rail system costs less than the cost of carrying the same number of riders on a bus-only system

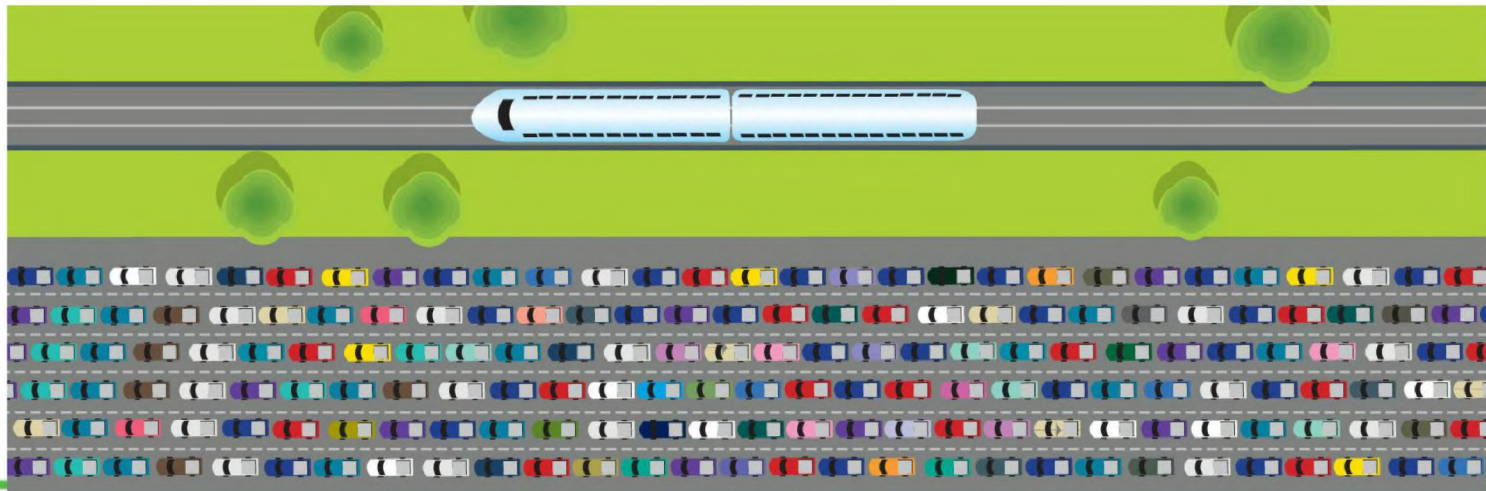
Projected Economic Benefits

- Building rail can fight the recession
- Creating 10,000 – 11,000 jobs a year
- Generating jobs in construction, restaurants, retail, and other industries



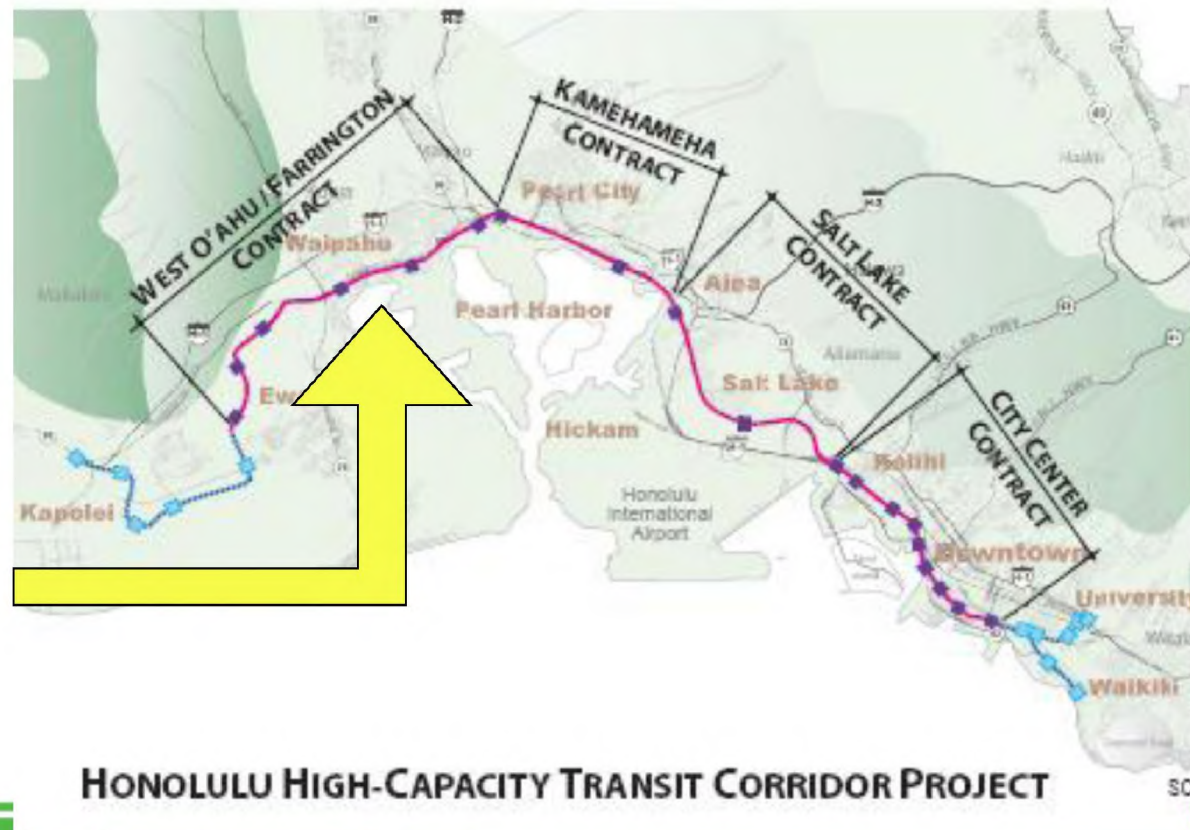
Traffic Benefits

- Rail will reduce future traffic delay by 23%
- Rail will remove more than 30,000 cars and trucks from our roads each day
- One 300-passenger train can take 200 vehicles off our roads



Moving Forward

- First construction contract seeking bids
- Construction to begin late 2009
- First segment operating by 2013



Stay Informed



- Sign up for the newsletter
- Watch Channel 54, Mondays at 6:30pm
- Visit www.honolulutransit.org
- Call the project hotline: 566-2299
- Stay informed with *accurate* information

Mahalo!

Speakers Bureau & Event Contacts

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Shenrika Glasco

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sglasco@honolulu.gov

Hawaiian Alphabet

A E I O U

H K L M N P W

‘Okina & Kahakō

Honolulu

Pauahi

Kapolei

Kamehameha

www.wehewehe.com